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*The Street of a Thousand Delights*



# *The Street of a Thousand Delights*

*By* JAY GELZER



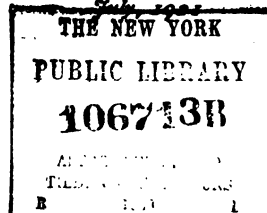
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# THE CHINESE LILY







**T**HERE is no reason whatever, at first glance, why the thoughts of Sen Yeng, fat John Chinaman sitting in the doorway of his shop in Melbourne like some obese spider awaiting unwary prey, should roam out persistently to Nels Larsen, striding to and fro over the narrow bridge of a tramp steamer laboring through heavy seas.

To look at Sen Yeng in his black satin coat and skull cap, his face with its three chins placidly benignant, is to imagine that his reflections, perhaps faintly tinged with poppy smoke, are of cormorants fishing in the rivers of Soochow, or of soft breezes blowing through papery leaves of bamboo with perhaps the slim sickle of a new moon overhead; or even of temple bells at twilight, their soft mellow tones mingled with the voices of shaven-headed, scarlet-robed priests chanting in the dusk.

And to look at Sailor Nels with his bold blue eyes is to imagine him living over again some bout in a barroom thick with smoke, or thinking back to kisses won and taken in various

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lands. A gay, laughing life, that of Nels Larsen, mate of the *Sallie O.*, not overburdened with regrets or colored with sentiment. Yet in the blackness of the midnight watch he is apt to fondle a bit of rare carven jade, and to him the perfume of sandalwood is bittersweet, bringing back as it does the vision of a flushed face with wide dark eyes and blue-black hair winding into the curls of the Occident and the sound of a lisping voice trilling out in the language of lovers.

There is, of course, a reason why the thoughts of Sen Yeng follow Nels Larsen half across the world. The Chinese Lily represents the reason, and to get at the story of Lily it is necessary first to go back a term of years and tell a little of the story of her mother.

She was at least nine-tenths white, that mother of Lily, and upon whose shoulders should rest the blame for that mixture of blood has never been known. But because of it both races, yellow and white, disowned her, and she had a hard life of it, hanging around on the utmost fringe of tolerance, accepting the kind words which fell to her lot with gratitude, and accepting the far too frequent blows and abuse with a sort of cowed lack of protest. They say, those few who really knew her, that she

. . . . .

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would have liked to be honest, that whatever depths of degradation she slipped into were the result of her youth, her forlornness, and the fixed inequality of the struggle between the sexes. And that, regardless of the black chapters in her sordid, unclean youth, there yet clung to her a sort of fastidiousness and gentleness, together with a frail beauty pitiful in its wistfulness.

However that may be, the beauty of Mamie—that was what she called herself, and it was as good a name as any—bloomed upon inappreciative eyes in the public house of Sidney, where she was first, and in Melbourne, to which she came later. To those demanding ruddy cheeks, bright eyes, buxom figures, and lively repartee, her white, little, heart-shaped face, her too large eyes, her delicacy of line, the pathetic showing of fine bones in her tender throat, even her wonderful bronze hair failed to appeal. Life crowded her relentlessly against that wall beyond which lies annihilation. And stubbornly, with that gameness which characterized her from the beginning, Mamie employed all her resources in a losing battle, although as she herself discouragedly said: “Gawd knows why I’m that bent on keepin’ breath in this yere body o’ mine. I ain’t

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found life what yer might call no bed o' roses!"

Only Nat Hong Ku, wealthy Chinaman in the Chinese quarter, upon whose poetic vision she had dawned with the loveliness of a lotus flower newly unfolded, or of a willow tree suddenly clothed in the tender leafage of spring, realized to the full that wistful, hungering, pathetic beauty, the contemplation of which filled him to overflowing with sheer delight.

Sometimes, on his quick, silent progress through a crowd, he glimpsed her face briefly as some far off star shining in the murk. And always the tiny shiver of sheer delight ran like flame through him as he pictured to himself that beauty freed of the eclipse of cheap finery and furnished with the proper setting. Before the resulting picture his artistic senses quivered with appreciation. Even in his folly he considered the idea of marrying Mamie, but Sun Yat, the yellow soothsayer, advised against the match.

*"Only from the tree which is sound cometh sound fruit!"* he intoned, quoting an ancient Chinese proverb as he cast down a handful of painted ivory sticks and showed Nat Hong Ku that the omens were unfavorable.

"True, O Honorable Brother!" responded Nat Hong Ku cannily. "And how should a

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tree be judged unless by the fruit?" Whereupon he put the idea out of mind.

And there perhaps it all would have ended, except that there came a day when Mamie, walking up the road from the waterway, shivering a bit in the raw air in her thin jacket, the wilted ostrich feather trailing from her hat, as jaded in appearance as she was in spirit, acknowledged the game was up. She was penniless and she was tired. And she was cold and hungry. The night before a sailor from an unknown ship had first cheated her with promises and then filched her purse and what cheap jewelry she had.

"There just ain't no honor among men anyhow," brooded poor Mamie miserably, blinking away a tear or two. "Might as well chuck it now as any time!"

Passing her at that very moment was Nat Hong Ku. In one swift instant he saw and understood the unshed tears, the forlorn desperation of her small face, and such a thrill of pity and love shot through him that he forgot to be cautious, desiring only to protect and cherish the object of his secret adoration. Putting out one sinewy yellow hand, he caught Mamie by her frail arm, his heart melting with pity at the very realization of her frailty.

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"You come along with me!" he suggested tentatively. "You marry with me, I give you everything you want!"

"Me!" gasped the amazed Mamie, looking up into the narrow, powerful face above her—and felt suddenly bathed in the veritable flood of protective kindness and love which issued from Nat Hong Ku's quiet dark eyes, the one-tenth yellow blood in her drawing to him as nothing else could have done. "Won't I just!" she sighed thankfully. Then, downcast: "Does yer know about me? I'm wantin' ter be square with yer."

Nat Hong Ku waved a graceful hand to show his indifference. "What is past is past," he observed philosophically in his perfect English. "A lily grows in the mud, but it is none the less a lily."

The marriage was happy. Mamie, steeped to drowsy content in the age-old atmosphere of another world, blossomed to unsuspected charm and beauty. Nat Hong Ku showered gifts upon her—rare silks from China, curious ornaments of jade and beaten silver, even a great ebony bed inlaid with pearl and hung with scarlet and gold draperies. He never tired of the picture of Mamie reclining upon that costly

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bed, rich fabrics piled to her small pointed chin, all the wealth and glory of her bronze hair trailing loose. Sometimes, sitting beside her in a carved teakwood chair, he would recite Cantonese love poems, and, leaning down, press a handful of that wonderful hair to his lips in mute ecstasy of adoration.

Mamie, half shy, half amused, would laugh a laugh full of all the cadences of a string of silver bells. "Ye're a queer one, ain't yer, Chinky? Actin' like I'm some sort er bloomin' idol!" she would say.

As for Mamie, she accepted her new life with Nat Hong Ku with utter content. The freedom from noise, from blows, and from ugliness filled her with such passionate gratitude that she deplored her inability to love him.

"Gawd knows I'd love yer if I could!" she would say dejectedly. "But it ain't in me no more to love anybody, that it ain't." Wherefore she desired all the more intensely to give flesh to the one big ambition of Nat Hong Ku's life—a son to pray him into paradise.

Her disappointment, when time produced a daughter instead of the much desired son, was pitiful.

"It ain't my fault, Chinky," she said to Nat Hong Ku, sitting attentively beside her.



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"Gawd knows I done me best." Tears hung upon her fringed eyelashes.

Nat Hong Ku, smothering his own disappointment, bent down to reassure her, smoothing back her disordered hair with a gentle hand.

"Grieve not, my Lotus Bloom," he soothed.

A pause followed. Then, without any great amount of interest or reluctance, rather indifferently in fact: "I'm blinkin' out," said Mamie.

"You are dying," assented Nat Hong Ku sorrowfully.

Another pause during which Mamie remembered Nat Hong Ku's great kindness to her. "Ye're been good ter me," she murmured appreciatively. "Yer kept yer word all right, all right; ye're been awful good ter me."

"Stronger than steel chains upon flesh is the word of Nat Hong Ku upon his soul," proclaimed Nat Hong Ku with austere dignity. Lighting fresh incense before the shrine in the corner, he began intoning the prayer for a departing soul.

Mamie interrupted him fretfully. "The kid—" she said abruptly. "Don't raise her in a stuffy, stinky, closed tight room, Chinky, lookin' out on things through a closed winder. Raise her—raise her *white*." Another pause.

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"Let her be free—see!" concluded Mamie vaguely.

"It shall be so," promised Nat Hong Ku. Again with shaking fingers he struck the bronze gong and began the prayer for a departing soul. . . .

This, then, is why the daughter of Nat Hong Ku, wealthy Chinese merchant of Melbourne, was given the freedom and education of a white child. The name he called her stood for The Bud Which Is Born of a Lotus Bloom. Lily, her teachers called her. And altogether he spent an entirely disproportionate amount upon her education for a mere girl child born to the tending of cook pots and the bearing of men children.

A strange child, Lily, differing utterly in all her naughty, elfish ways from the sedate children of Chinatown with their stolidness and their absurd dignity. Black eyes only slightly slanting, blue-black hair winding into heavy curls, skin of the texture of a tea rose, she was to all intents and purposes entirely white—which was in itself a tragedy.

To see Lily at sixteen, spending her life restlessly in the dim recesses of her father's great store, was to see some wonderful figurine,

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carved by forgotten fingers, suddenly come to life amid the perfume of sandalwood and spice. And to see her floating down the water road of Melbourne in her satin trousers, a flaming flower in the blue-black coils above her small pink ears, was to gasp with amazement at some impossible vision. She was rather surprisingly lovely in a vivid, exotic way—the straight delicacy of feature found in the high caste Chinese, heavy bangs cut square across her forehead, all Mamie's wistful, hungering appeal warmed by something more restless and challenging. Sydenham of the British Consulate said he never saw Lily without realizing the tragedy of white blood enmeshed in yellow, without hearing the fluttering of wings against a cage, without realizing to the fullest what a prison life can be.

Naturally in a town full of the dregs of life, such loveliness unprotected by the inhibition of pure white blood did not go unremarked. Surprisingly enough, however, neither by word nor deed was insult offered to Lily, daughter of Nat Hong Ku, there being, of course, a reason.

For instance, Bill 'Awkins of the *Ireland Rose*, clutching the arm of his pal in genuine alarm as Lily went past:

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“Fer Gawd’s sake, Matey,—don’t go lampin’ that bit o’ yellow calico! Her dad’s the richest Chink in Melbourne, chopsticks set with diamonds an’ all, head o’ the biggest Chinese tong in town. One o’ his men’ll knife yer straight ter ’ell if yer go worriting that gel o’ his.”

“Gor’sakes!” breathed his companion fervently, creepy chills frisking up a limp backbone, bulging eyes riveted on an inconspicuous figure nearby, arms folded, shoulders hunched. “I ain’t got no eyes fer that bit o’ cloth a-tall, a-tall!”

The life of Lily ought to be told in a series of flashbacks like a movie and not compressed within the meager limits of a few thousand words: Lily, standing straight and slim in the doorway of her father’s shop, her brooding eyes under their heavy black bangs watching the mixed crowd flowing by, pondering over her inevitable sense of withdrawal from the yellow race; Lily, standing on one of the two great landing piers in the harbor, wistfully regarding the ships setting sail for countries she would never see; Lily, dreaming in her window in the moonlight, yearning for something different than she had ever known, failing to understand, in the impulse which one day was entirely satisfied in the perfumes and silks and rare mer-

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chandise of the shop and another day cried out for great spaces filled with wind and flowers and sunshine, the tragedy of her mixed blood—there are so many Lilys which could be shown, each carrying an appeal for understanding.

There came a time when the girl was ripe for love, as ripe as some sun-warmed peach hanging in a sheltered garden. And Nat Hong Ku, seeing her dreaming eyes, taking note of her fits of impatience and revolt, narrowed his own eyes thoughtfully, uneasily remembering Mamie and the unknown ancestors back of her. "*Only from the sound tree cometh sound fruit . . .*" he murmured to himself more than once.

Then, while Lily tugged and strained at the anchorage of her sheltered life like some trim sailing vessel anxious to sail for parts unknown, two things happened which were to govern and control her destiny as the trade winds would have governed the course of that same boat.

From the open seas a rusty little tramp steamer drifted into Melbourne for repairs, carrying as mate Nels Larsen with his sea blue eyes and pink and white and gold viking coloring.

And from Shanghai Sen Yeng, brother merchant of Nat Hong Ku, received word of the

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death of his only son. No calamity could have been greater, and not even the news of the gorgeous burial in a scarlet coffin ornamented with green and gold dragons, with its accompaniment of a dozen Buddhist priests, robed in scarlet and chanting the blessing of the dead, could soothe his grief. Nor could May Ling, his wife, lend consolation. Sen Yeng grieved mightily, neglecting his business, scorning the tempting meals of fish and rice and preserved ginger May Ling prepared for him, spending his time in idleness, consuming great quantities of Chinese rice whiskey, and brooding sullenly over the blow which had smitten his life in twain.

And at last, coming in on him where he reclined in a dejected stupor, smoking from a tiny pipe tasseled in scarlet, May Ling made to him a potent suggestion.

"To the flowers are given buds, to the trees are given fruit, but to the withered bough is not even given leaves," she said quietly, settling herself beside him. Picking up a pair of tiny silver pincers she filled another pipe for herself, taking two long deliberate puffs with feminine daintiness.

"It is true, O Mother of a Son Who Is Dead," assented Sen Yeng, regarding her

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scalp, painted black to conceal her baldness, and her wrinkled old hands.

"Then—" said May Ling, refilling her pipe and sucking in a puff of smoke sharply, "—to the garden of our life must be added yet another tree . . . a young tree which beareth fruit."

Sen Yeng laid down his pipe. A long silence followed.

"There is San Me, daughter of the merchant Yung Lo," suggested May Ling placidly.

"Nat Hong Ku has a daughter . . ." remarked Sen Yeng. His fancy went out swiftly to Lily with her white face and dreaming eyes.

May Ling demurred. "The daughter of a mother in whose veins flowed the blood of foreign devils," she pointed out.

"A daughter whose beauty is that of the full moon floating in a sea of clouds," pursued Sen Yeng undisturbed.

"*Only from the tree which is sound cometh sound fruit,*" insisted May Ling.

". . . like a full moon in a sea of clouds!" repeated Sen Yeng, narrowing his eyes as if in contemplation of that beauty. "Are not her eyes dark, is not her hair dark, is she not of our race?"

"Where the blood calls, there will the heart

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follow," argued May Ling shrewdly. Then, seeing his absorption, a twisted smile of resignation wreathed her thin lips. "When man is determined upon folly, even words of wisdom hold no meaning," finished May Ling quietly.

After due reflection Sen Yeng took his dignified way to call upon Nat Hong Ku, moving slowly in his inch thick felt slippers, hands crossed decorously on his broad stomach. Over a cup of finest Formosa tea steeped with dried orange blossoms, he stated his errand, subtly, with all the indirection of an Oriental negotiating a business project.

"A great calamity has befallen my house," he informed Nat Hong Ku, laying down his empty cup upside down in token of plenty. His great bulk draped around his small bones almost in folds. His several chins rested against his chest in complete repose.

"Doubtless you refer, Most Honorable Brother, to the regrettable death of your respected son?" inquired Nat Hong Ku with ready sympathy.

"Indeed so."

A pause, broken at length by Sen Yeng. "My wife is too old to bear me another son,"



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he said at length, as one offering further calamitous news.

Nat Hong Ku murmured inarticulate sympathy.

"You have a daughter . . ." Sen Yeng let fall very casually.

"A most beautiful daughter," agreed Nat Hong Ku cordially.

"Such a daughter is worth"—Sen Yeng hesitated cannily—"at least a thousand pounds English," he finished, urged beyond his native thrift by his memory of Lily's beauty.

"A most satisfactory match," returned Nat Hong Ku tranquilly, and he meant it. For Lily, with the offense of her foreign blood, Sen Yeng with his wealth was a piece of very good fortune. "There is, however," he said further, "the small matter of a promise to her mother, unhappily dead." He related Mamie's demand for her daughter.

Sen Yeng shrugged his fat shoulders. "Has not my house doors—and windows?" he queried. "Shall not these be always open?"

Palm met palm, the agreement was sealed. Sen Yeng took his ponderous departure. On the way home he stopped and drove a keen bargain with an English trader, observing to May Ling later with much satisfaction:

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"One hundred and twenty pounds' profit on the day's business, which shall be laid aside for the son who will be mine."

May Ling said nothing. Nor did her expression change, except perhaps for a brief flickering of half closed eyelids.

Over his evening meal of stewed duck, pigeon eggs, and fried batter, Nat Hong Ku, helping himself finally to ginger from a blue Canton jar, told his news to Lily, pensively crumbling snowy rice with a silver fork. Even in her table manners Lily was white.

"Next week you go with your belongings to the house of my honorable friend, Sen Yeng," he told Lily in his gentle, almost indifferent voice.

An odd sound escaped Lily. The silver fork clattered to the table.

"Sen Yeng!" she said breathlessly. "He is very old—and fat!"

Nat Hong Ku raised his eyes. "Next week," he repeated inexorably, "you go with your belongings to the house of my friend, Sen Yeng. It is arranged."

Lily pushed back her chair, escaping from the room as from a danger which threatened. Upstairs at the window which looked out over

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gable roofs gilded with late afternoon sunshine, she watched for a time a great white slug feeding upon a dwarf rosebush, reminded in some obscure way of Sen Yeng and his fat.

Finally, fleeing the sight, she went down the water road to her favorite pastime of watching the ships newly come from lands of mystery. Sitting there on the steps at the very end of the pier, so near the water that she drew back her feet with each succeeding heavy swell, the soft damp sea wind curling her hair into tiny spirals, she gave herself up to the burning resentment and rebellion which seethed through her. Life, to Lily, had seemed some wonderful adventure, always on the very point of beginning. But now the future would hold only Sen Yeng and his three chins, Sen Yeng, whose very name was like the touch of a clumsy hand upon her dreams. Tears welled up in her slightly slanting dark eyes, scarlet touched her cheeks.

And it was upon this picture Nels Larsen stumbled, his great white throat bared to the breeze as he idled along to the end of the pier for a smoke.

"Some looker!" he said involuntarily, noting the small clenched hands, the slender silken ankles below the blue suit, the scarlet flowers against blue-black hair.

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The clenched hands relaxed. Youth will not be cheated of its romance, and Lily may have felt, looking up at the pink and white and gold strength of Nels Larsen, that he offered something which would never come again. Or maybe the something wild in him called to something equally wild in her. At any rate she smiled: a smile which was a distinct invitation.

With much deliberation Nels sat down beside her, laughing as an ambitious wave broke over his feet. Then with an expertness which argued much practice, he slid one arm around Lily.

"Waiting for me, sweetness?" he suggested impudently.

And, finding in that rough caress something more satisfying than the suavities of the yellow men who were her father's intimates, Lily smiled again. "I have been waiting one ver' long time," she said to Nels Larsen in her pretty, slightly foreign way.

If this were to be the story of Lily and Nels Larsen much could be written of their swiftly ripening acquaintance. Of, for instance, that very next night when Nels came to the pier half angry.

"You've fair bewitched me," he accused.

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"I ain't claiming to be no blooming angel—I've given and taken kisses where I could get 'em. It's a man's life, me being free 'n all. But last night in the eating house there was a girl what fancied me. And I couldn't lay as much as my little finger on her for your face standing between. *Me!* And I'm not wanting to be that fond of any woman on earth, I'm not."

Or of another night when he held both her small fluttering hands in his, speaking very seriously. "Ain't it queer now," he said thoughtfully, "here I am, from way the other side of the world, and you with a yellow dad and all, but the first time I set my eyes on yer I knew as you were meant for me. We're kin somehow, my Chinese Lily. And ye're white at heart, my girl. Don't ever be forgetting that!"

Or of still another night when Nels, moved by the hint of something tragic which clung to Lily, feeling himself the fluttering of wings against the bars of a cage, was moved to be still more serious. "If I was captain now instead of mate, I'd be taking you right along o' me when we sail," he told her uneasily. "But I'll be coming back, Lily-girl. I'll be back." He tightened his arms around her, crowding his cheek roughly against hers.

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Lily felt upward in the starlit darkness and laid one hand upon his eyes. "Dear blue eyes I have so adore!" she whispered, perhaps thinking of the small eyes of Sen Yeng encased in yellow fat. She had not spoken of Sen Yeng to Nels. Why vex him with knowledge she herself found unsupportable, especially when no good could come of it?

Then there was that last night when they sat long hours cheek to cheek in an intimacy of thought which required no words until the first opalescent mists of dawn tinged the sky. She gave him at parting a carved jade charm set with sapphires. "To keep you safe from harm . . . and happy," she told him tremulously.

And Nels, not knowing he was not to see Lily again, smiled at her earnestness and thrust it carelessly into his pocket. "You've given me yer luck, I'll give yer mine."

From his own neck he took a pierced coin slung on a leather cord and put it around her slimmer neck. Lily looked up at him with a twisted smile, thinking of the future with Sen Yeng so ominously impending and which no charm could ward away.

"Dear blue eyes—" she said, and her voice was blurred with the sound of unshed tears.

"Love o' me life, don't yer know I'll be com-

## THE STREET OF A

ing back as soon as soon?" assured Nels Larsen anxiously. "Don't yer know that, my Chinese Lily?"

Later that same morning Lily, coming to the old familiar place haunted still by the presence of Nels with his magic voice and his laughing eyes, uttered a strange longing cry. Where the *Sallie O.* had been was an empty space. For a long time she sat looking very steadily at the waves breaking just below her feet, but in the end she went back to the shop of Nat Hong Ku, and the very next day she went to the house of Sen Yeng, accompanied by chests full of garments heavy with pearls and embroideries. Nat Hong Ku had not been niggardly in the wedding finery of his daughter.

May Ling made her welcome. She was even kind to her. Sen Yeng himself was radiant, presenting her with a wonderful robe from Canton made of satin heavy enough to stand alone, and bracelets of snowy jade set with emeralds, which Lily let lie unheeded where he had placed them. Hour after hour she sat at a window facing toward the sea, tracing in her mind the laboring path of the *Sallie O.*

May Ling remonstrated at last. "The horse which will not be led must be driven," she said

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to Lily firmly. "Not thus is the manner of a bride come to an honorable household."

Lily looked up with heavy eyes. "The heart knoweth its own," she retorted. "Shall there be a rejoicing where there is no joy?"

"The heart of a Chinese woman is a caged bird," pointed out May Ling with something of sadness. "Once in China, from my father's garden—" she shut her lips firmly upon the reminiscence. "Look upon the giver of rich gifts at least with politeness," she admonished. "All this will be forgotten when you are mother of a son."

"Is not my blood white, and does not white blood call for freedom?" demanded Lily. "Are these things to be forgotten?" Impatiently she turned away, clutching the coin around her neck.

In the days which followed Lily came to wear in due time that patient stolid look found in Oriental women of a possessed woman hating the possessor. Not but that Sen Yeng was very kind and gentle, more than kind, in fact, after he himself began to wear the radiant look of a man whose dearest wish is to be gratified. In The Gathering Place of the Most High, where he went to mingle with his kind and indulge in



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an occasional game of fan tan, a son was freely predicted, and Sen Yeng would come back beaming with joy.

"O Branch Which Beareth the Bud of Life," he would say to Lily, lying inertly on the bed of ebony and pearl which had been Mamie's, her eyes on the window looking seaward, "many shall be the gifts which shall be yours on the birthday of my son."

And Lily, listening, would smile a queer little smile in which mirth and defiance were subtly blended.

Once, however, he made complaint to Nat Hong Ku in some distress of mind, genuinely worried over the girl. "The song bird which I have removed from your honorable house to my less worthy dwelling place sings no longer," he said plaintively.

"Soon come little birds and then the mother bird will sing," reassured Nat Hong Ku placidly. But after his visitor had gone he sat long in thought, eyes narrowed in his lean, powerful face.

Then came a day when the long-awaited son became an actual fact, and May Ling went down to where Sen Yeng sat waiting in anticipation.

"A man child?" he inquired anxiously, and at her murmur of assent, he indicated a pile

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of articles beside him. "Gifts for the mother of my son," he explained happily. "A pound of the finest tea, for which I have paid three pounds wholesale, a necklace of hammered gold set with rubies, the finest of satins for new garments—"

"All these you will not give," disputed May Ling. "One gift and one alone you will give instead."

"And that?" His little eyes blinked at her, half in fear.

"In the scarlet chest with the carved dragons is a silver filigree bottle . . ." said May Ling in a voice barely above a whisper.

Sen Yeng turned purplish. His breath whistled through coarse sagging lips. He looked at May Ling imploringly. "But the silver bottle is the gift of an honorable husband to an unfaithful wife!" he chattered.

"Even so," agreed May Ling. "Yet what gift more suitable for the mother of a blue-eyed son—a pink and white and gold son with eyes bluer than the sea!"

Presently, looking older and more shrunken, as if his fat had somehow sagged upon him, Sen Yeng went to where Lily reclined against pillows of scarlet and purple and gold on the great ebony and pearl bed.

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"I come bearing a gift in hand, O Mother of a Son," he said politely.

"I am unworthy," objected Lily, wearily courteous.

Sen Yeng sucked in his breath sharply. "None more worthy, O Mother of a Blue-eyed Son," he protested. "Deign to accept." And from the protection of his wide sleeve he held out the silver bottle.

Lying back utterly relaxed against her pillows, her face pearl white, her blue-black hair drawn back from her forehead, showing the point in which it grew, Lily regarded the outstretched hand without visible change of expression. If, indeed, at that moment any emotion claimed her, it was a feeling of triumph over the defeating of those fellow conspirators, Nat Hong Ku and Sen Yeng, who had sought to cheat her of the cup of life from which she had drunk so deeply.

After a moment she put out her own smaller, whiter, slimmer hand and took the tiny bottle into her own clasp—took it, indeed, with something of gladness, perhaps seeing in it a door of escape from a future which oppressed her with its narrow limitations and its lack of joy.

"What matter the price paid for golden hours?" she said to Sen Yeng, ecstasy flooding

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her face as her thoughts went to Nels Larsen. "Though it be a million years until I rejoin my Beloved, *yet* will I not forget! For what is to-day . . . or to-morrow . . . or yesterday?"

"It is true," acquiesced Sen Yeng humbly, himself sensing the flutter of wings against bars.

But Lily had forgotten Sen Yeng. One hand went up to the pierced coin.

"Dear blue eyes I have so adore!" she sighed, sending a last incoherent greeting of love across trackless wastes to Nels Larsen on the *Sallie O*.

With tears of pity running down his fat cheeks, unable to look upon the destruction of so much youth and beauty, Sen Yeng turned and went out, going down to sit upon his doorstep in the sunshine, just a fat old Chinaman whose thoughts, instead of roaming out to an unknown blue-eyed sailor, should have been of plum and cherry blossoms in a Chinese garden. Or perhaps of square-sailed junks floating down silent rivers like shadows.

Later May Ling joined him there. "It is over," she said in a hushed tone. "The soul of the Chinese Lily has gone out like an extinguished flame." Then, more assertively: "*Only from the tree which is sound . . .*" she began.

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But Sen Yeng interrupted. "Once, in China," he said solemnly, "a butterfly floated into the temple garden where I had gone to feed the tortoises. And I wanted it. More than I ever had wanted anything before, did I want that butterfly. And I ran and ran until my fat legs were tired and my head was dizzy. And at last I caught it. But when I looked at the pretty thing it had crumbled to a heap of dust in my hot grasp. And my heart was filled with sorrow and I wept loudly. And presently came one of the priests from the temple, a very old and wise man. And he stood above me, looking down upon me with sad eyes.

" 'You should have let it fly in the sun,' he said to me."

Sen Yeng paused, looking with vacant eyes at the silent May Ling.

" 'You should have let it fly in the sun; it was not meant for you,' the old priest said to me," he repeated, as the thin wail of a very young child floated through the air.

**THE BLUE EYES OF WANG  
HAI**





**S**EN YENG, with his three chins and black satin coat and his look of a drowsing Buddha, is a leading merchant in the Chinese quarter of Melbourne.

In the fore part of his shop, its embroidered panels setting forth elaborately the Five Chinese Virtues, he does a prosperous business in tea, spices, and raw silks, doing a no less prosperous business in the rear, where slant-eyed Mongolians in the blue cotton of their native land slink stealthily in, purchasing small innocent-seeming packages of cheap tea for some fifty or sixty pounds English. Lest this price seem incredible, let it here be explained that these innocent-seeming packages of ordinary tea, expertly opened, disclose in their innocuous depths the black gum of crude opium.

So, altogether, Sen Yeng is a man of wealth and substance on that street known as The Street of a Thousand Delights, subtly deferred to in The Gathering Place of the Most High, where he mingles with his kind, and likewise in the establishment of Wong Ting Fu, with its



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ebony bunks and expensive pipes, where he goes to merge in opalescent poppy smoke the drab reality of life in Melbourne with the more picturesque life of the land from which he came, seeing again in his tinted dreams the pointed roofs of temples sharp against the turquoise skies and hillsides pink and mauve with azaleas.

In the crowded rooms above his shop, May Ling, his plump little wife with the tiny feet of a highborn Chinese woman, shares his prosperity, spending her days embroidering or listening to the tales of blind Sing Lu, who earns his daily rice painting word pictures of glories he will never see, while an amah imported from China busies herself on her less ornamental but more useful feet preparing the meals of snowy rice, dried ducks, and other dainties with which the family of the prosperous Sen Yeng are amply supplied.

So, altogether, life falls in very pleasant lines for Sen Yeng himself, for May Ling, his wife, and for Wing Chun, his adopted son. Only sometimes, sipping deep of the cup of adulation extended by his less fortunate associates, Sen Yeng remembers Wang Hai, his blue-eyed son, and for just a second the heady wine of flattery is tinged with the bitterness

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of futility. But instantly, being a man of wisdom, he rallies, and from his coarse, sagging lips, as he fans slowly, beaming on the assembled company with his sleepy, Buddha-like face, a pearl of thought drops:

"A wise man does not trouble the clear mirror of his soul with the shadow of what is past," he pronounces importantly. "As a Mohammedan faces East in his morning prayer, the wise man faces toward the future in his daily life!"

A murmur of discreet admiration follows, and once more life is pleasant for Sen Yeng, prosperous Chinese merchant of Melbourne. . . .

Back in that past which still has power to trouble the tranquil life of Sen Yeng occurred the birth of Wang Hai and the death of The Chinese Lily, his mother, second wife of Sen Yeng, in all her youth and beauty. After her death Sen Yeng, always the man of business, devoted himself with redoubled ardor to driving shrewd bargains with his keen Mongolian brain, intent only upon the piling up of a comfortable fortune and the rearing of his son, Wang Hai, to do honor to his name when he had passed on. During the childhood of Wang Hai there were about Sen Yeng only three

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things of unusual significance: The closed and bolted room in his dwelling-place which was never opened; his hatred of the sea and all things pertaining thereto; and the blue eyes of his son, Wang Hai.

And these things, seemingly so unrelated, yet had a subtle bearing upon each other, having as the center of their reason of being The Chinese Lily, dead in her fresh young beauty.

Sen Yeng himself never spoke of these things, wrapping himself round in an impenetrable armor of contentment.

"Only two things are necessary to the contentment of a philosopher . . ." he would inform his interested audience from one of the ebony bunks in the establishment of Wong Ting Fu, gesticulating with a carved peachwood pipe tasseled in scarlet, ". . . a full stomach and a son to worship at his grave. And both of these through the grace of the Lord Buddha are mine!"

"And is that *all?*" would query Wong Ting Fu the Manchu softly, his thin lips twisted with something close to contempt, his eyes misted with a softer emotion as his thoughts went to his blind, golden-haired wife, Rosy May. "Are you not forgetting love, O Honorable Merchant?"

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"Not wanted!" would retort Sen Yeng then, a rancorous bitterness underlying his words. "Love I leave to the poets—or to a Manchu like yourself, O Highly Respected One. For myself, I am a plain man of business, not a man of sentiment. For me the comfort of a dish of steaming suey, or a duck cooked sweet and tender—ahi!" he smacked thick lips with gusto. "The wise man delights in the pleasures of appetite, which are safe and comfortable, and not in love, which is a dream soon over." A shrug. "And if a man must have dreams—" he continued largely, "are not the dreams blown from the lily pipe more beautiful—and safer—than the dreams of love?"

A sally of coarse laughter greeted his words. A few remarks about love impossible to render into unblushing English followed. Sen Yeng sighed deep with satisfaction.

"And I have a son, strong and dutiful *and* obedient . . ." he muttered sleepily.

"*And* with blue eyes!" added Wong Ting Fu.

"Indeed so!" agreed Sen Yeng. From under his lowered lids purple lights glowed briefly.

"A most dutiful son!" assured Wong Ting Fu hastily.

"Indeed so," agreed Sen Yeng, relaxing to

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the soothing influence of poppy smoke drawn deep into his capacious lungs.

So, if sometimes, regarding sardonically the eagerness of Wang Hai for tales of the sea, bystanders would quirk an eyebrow or derisively tuck a sly tongue in cheek, no word was openly said by the prudent ones aware of the power of Sen Yeng. As Sun Yat the Sooth-sayer aptly put it:

“Truly, if there are times when speech is silver, yet are there times when silence is golden!”

Certainly, however, Wang Hai of the blue eyes did not share his father's aversion to the sea. From his birth he loved it, stealing away to the waterside as soon as his small legs would safely carry him to burrow contentedly in the clean white sand, finding increasing fascination in the shells and moss and strange sea creatures he found there. Then Sen Yeng, a tauness under his three quivering chins, would recapture him, bringing him back in a veritable tempest of shrieking protest. In all the years of his childhood, Wang Hai, reared to the habit of unquestioning obedience and filial piety, was yet unable to concede obedience upon this one point.

“The great serpent living in the sea calls to

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me!" he would explain to the gravely listening Sen Yeng, reclining on a heap of cushions, his great bulk draped around him. "And when it calls, then must the heart of Wang Hai respond."

Over his head the eyes of Sen Yeng would meet those of May Ling, his wife, with her placid, carefully painted face and veined old hands.

*"Only from the tree which is sound cometh sound fruit!"* she would intone sonorously, her words harking back to the tragic happenings of other years.

Across the fat saffron jowls of Sen Yeng would creep a flush. "Even an unsound tree may give forth sound fruit if the fruit be carefully tended," he would dispute.

As the years slipped by the yearning of Wang Hai for the sea intensified. Every moment he could steal from the shop was spent on the great landing piers of the city, watching tramp steamers unloading strange freight, drinking in avidly the tales of rough seafaring men, feeling in his bosom a longing to travel surging wastes to the lands from which the boxes and barrels came. Even in the changing sea itself, with its tumbling waves, its emeralds and cobalts, and its weeping mists, he found

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unceasing delight, the rough caress of a fresh breeze satisfying something deep down in him which rebelled instinctively against the heaviness of incense, the flowery sayings of Chinese classics, the smoothly insincere courtesies of the yellow men who were his associates, and, indeed, against the whole sluggish current of his life. Among his own race blue-eyed Wang Hai, driven by the spur of cheated, unrecognized desires, felt himself an alien tugging at the restraining rope of his Chinese rearing, the still, tranquil, lethargic life of China repelling the something turbulent in him which lay just below the surface.

Only with his grandfather, Nat Hong Ku, poet and philosopher, did he find anything of companionship. And Nat Hong Ku, watching the signs of struggle in the young face and seeing the coming of a faint hardness to the sensitive young mouth, sighed to himself as he imparted to Wang Hai a knowledge of Shelley, Byron, and other English poets.

"In China . . ." he would say to himself with troubled eyes, "do we have a custom of paying the priests of the temples a sum of money with which to set free animals otherwise doomed to death, thus acquiring merit in the eyes of the gods for a merciful act. Here we

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have no freeing place, but it may be that some day I shall set free a living soul . . . and not for the purpose of acquiring merit. Ahi!"

But as Nat Hong Ku bided his time, a creeping distrust of Wang Hai grew among the staid Chinese.

"Where blue eyes yearn, there must the heart follow," said Sun Yat the Soothsayer wisely. "The eyes of Wang Hai, son of Sen Yeng, are not dark like unto those of our race, nor yet slanting—nor has his hair the blackness of a son of China."

To which his listeners, Sen Yeng being absent, made cordial agreement.

So, conscious of the whispers of the yellow men and their lack of friendliness, Wang Hai was driven to the sea for companionship, or to watch, face pressed against a window, the life of the alien race, wondering at his feeling of fellowship and his sense of belonging to this so-different life.

On one such night Higgins, doorkeeper at the Bristol Club, pulled him forcibly away from the window.

"None o' that, yer bloomin' yeller Chink!" he ordered sharply. "It ain't fer the likes o' you to be a-lookin' in on the doin's o' decent folks."



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Then, influenced by the unresisting dignity of Wang Hai, he peered up intently into his face. "A Chink with blue eyes!" he spluttered amazedly.

As he told one of his cronies confidentially later on: "It fair gave me an ugly start ter see them blue eyes lookin' back at me so unblinkin' like above them heathen idol clothes!"

With lonely days following lonely days, and with love of the sea and distaste for his enforced life joining forces to battle against him, Wang Hai grew at last to manhood—a manhood seeming to promise no future release from the walls of circumstance shaping him into uncongenial mold.

Long evenings he spent down on the big landing piers, looking up into starlit skies, stifling the protest in his heart against the ultimatum of Sen Yeng.

"My respected parent does not love the sea . . ." he would brood unhappily, looking out over heaving wastes of water. "Wherefore, it being to him only a wetness and a source of danger, he wishes me in the store, and as his son I must obey. But to me—ah . . ." he would draw a deep breath down into his powerful lungs, ". . . the salt of the air, the surge

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of the water, the great winged ships—all this is life itself!”

He was down on the pier the night Jewel came into his life, and she came, oddly enough, as a gift of the sea he so loved. Standing there hunched against a convenient post, shoulders drooping, arms folded across his great chest, staring moodily down into the dark waters sucking hungrily at the piling of the pier, he felt the swift flash of a moving figure past him, a slight sob lingering upon the disturbed air. From the dark waters below came a splash.

Just why Wang Hai, trained to a stoic admiration of suicide and a racial lack of consideration for women, unhesitatingly followed that splash into the water must find its explanation in his blue eyes.

Presently, by reason of his great strength, he drew both his burden and himself out of the water onto the pier, stretching the dripping figure out carefully on the rough boards and bending over anxiously.

A very young girl with drenched hair of a glimmering gold undimmed by the water opened dark eyes upon him ungratefully.

“Whatever did yer do it for?” she protested in a silver thread of a voice, sitting up erect, water dripping from her clothes. “Ain’t it

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bad enough ter be nervin' yerself up ter a thing like that without you cuttin' in an' spoilin' the whole bloomin' job?"

"You are young," remonstrated Wang Hai, regarding compassionately the pinched youth of her face, the tender flesh of her small bones, and her pathetically dragged flimsy finery.

"Wot difference does it make whether ye're young or old, if death's in yer bloomin' heart?" retorted the girl sullenly.

And then, his continued silence apparently laying upon her a need of explanation, she flared into crudely dramatic speech.

"I'm new here in this town," she said abruptly. "Came out here from England with six other girls—ponies in a dancin' act—see? An' we thought as how we'd be goin' back soon all covered with gold an' diamonds like them idol things you Chinks worship . . ." In the faint rays of moonlight he saw the bitter smile twisting the softness of her young mouth. "But the bloomin' act came a cropper an' we had ter bust up an' shift fer ourselves—" Again the bitter smile twisting the softness of a young mouth into a caricature of youth. "It weren't so bad fer the rest o' them . . . some girls know how to handle men, keepin' 'em standin' off in a circle like a pack o' hungry

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dogs lookin' at a bone an' somehow afraid ter snap at it—but me, I never could manage, p'r'aps because I'm young an' little an' scared way down deep inside o' me!" she paused, gulping with remembrance.

"So that sort o' makes me fair game fer them," she continued drearily. "I got work in a pub, but a week ago I got bounced fer slappin' his nibs the owner. Well . . . he'll be bloomin' careful the next time he slides his fat arm around a girl ter be sure as she wants it!"

"You are cold; you must go home," interrupted Wang Hai gently, observing the shiver which shook her whole slight figure.

A short sound, hardly to be termed a laugh, came from the shivering girl.

"That's just the rub—I ain't got no home to go to!" she explained impatiently. "My landlady—an' a scoldin' shrew she was—turned me out on the street. Said as how there was ways a pretty girl not too particular could earn room rent in Melbourne same as any other place . . ." Her voice dropped on a perceptible note of pitiful injury and indignation.

"But you chose—ah—the sea instead?" inquired Wang Hai softly.

"Might as well choose the water at the

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beginnin' o' that road instead o' the end," returned the girl hardily. "I knows that road fair well, I do: kisses an' compliments at the beginnin', dope an' curses when yer ain't so good-lookin' any more, an' in the end a jump inter the water with nobody carin'. An' *me*—I'd sooner jump in the first place . . ."

Surprisingly she broke into a heavy sobbing. "I didn't want ter die—I didn't!" she said below her breath. "I ain't had anythin' outer life yet—not a bloomin' thing!"

A silence. Shamefacedly she began mopping at her face with a wet and grimy handkerchief.

"I'm sorry," she muttered. "It just come over me of a sudden as how I ain't never had a chance, an' it seemed fair hard ter blink out without ever havin' had *anythin'*."

Her words cut straight through the envelope of careful Chinese rearing to something vital in Wang Hai himself, revealing a similarity between them and loosing a rush of sympathy.

"You have courage," he reflected aloud. "It would have been easier to—ah—"

"Not fer me!" denied the girl dejectedly. "Gawd knows I ain't wantin' ter be like this—it'd be easier if I was the other way! But somehow I can't be standin' the weight of a man's hand on me unless I'm carin' about him."

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It ain't anythin' ter my credit so ter speak, it's just like a matter o' bein' born blue-eyed or with a hair lip—it's *me*, an' that's that!" She sighed. "I ain't got no chance," she confessed. "I ain't never had one. I ain't smart, I ain't educated, an' I ain't able ter take care o' me, an' then there's the loneliness—I mind it! Those as don't mind the loneliness, they're safe. But me—I minds it! Yer meant ter be kind, but it'll be the water fer me sooner or later." Her tone ran over into a cry of despairing fury. "I ain't got no chance at all!" she cried. "It's allers been a-hangin' over me waitin' ter close down like the snuffer on a bloomin' candle!"

Beneath the sudden upleaping rush of dejection in her thin young voice was a pathetic indictment of indignities suffered dispiritedly, of familiarities she had hardly dared resent, of unwelcome attentions from silk-hatted, well-fed men playing a game of cat and mouse with inexperienced youth.

To Wang Hai, hearing and understanding, came the strongly partisan feeling of a generous heart for the underdog, accompanied by a wish to help.

"The first of the Chinese Virtues is Benevolence," he observed quietly. "I will give to you that chance you have never had."

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The girl turned upon him a look both searching and sophisticated.

"Ye're a Chink—a bloomin' yellin' Chink!" she muttered, unconvinced.

"As you say," agreed Wang Hai without offense. "I am—ah—a blooming, yellow Chink."

He waited imperturbably, listening to the splash of oily waves against the piling of the pier, chilled himself by the raw wind playing over him.

"Yer mean yer won't—" stammered the girl, searching his eyes and finding only a pitying concern. Suddenly she reached decision. "I'm goin' ter trust yer!" she said in a sharp whisper. "Bein' as I got ter trust somebody." Then, with a wisp of a gallant laugh: "An' if I been findin' white men yellin', maybe as how I'll find a yellin' man white—see?" After which, because she was very young and forlorn and hungry and miserable, Jewel slid down softly into a pathetic wet heap of unconsciousness.

Wang Hai, after some moments of indecision, lifted her in his two strong arms and set out, his padded velvet slippers leaving a wet imprint, for the Street of a Thousand Delights.

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It was, he recognized, the one place he could obtain shelter for his unconscious burden.

In the house of Madam Kwei Ling, a widow whose necessity rendered her slightly less curious than the average Chinese, he obtained a room scantily furnished with a low bed, a camphorwood chest, a threadbare rug, and a strip of embroidery quoting excerpts from the sayings of Buddha. To the ministrations of Madam Kwei Ling herself he confided the unconscious Jewel.

Perhaps an hour later Madam Kwei Ling, her curiosity discreetly veiled, ushered him into the room where Jewel lay on the low bed, clothed in one of Madam Kwei Ling's gay brocade gowns, her masses of fast drying gold hair spread around her.

And if, in the darkness, Wang Hai responded only to the flood of an irresistible pity, now, seeing for the first time the possibilities of beauty the girl possessed, he felt stir within him a deeper, stronger emotion. For it was true beauty Jewel possessed, a beauty worn threadbare and pitiful by the adversity of circumstances: great, brown, heavily fringed eyes of limpid appeal, a face too thinned and shrunk, hollows where curves should have



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bloomed, the tender young bones of her throat showing beneath too tight flesh, a tracery of blue veins upon her slender arms.

Impulsively Wang Hai put out a hand and touched that clinging wealth of hair. "Like the gold of which ornaments are made!" he marveled. "What wealth for such a small head to carry!"

And Jewel, raising heavy eyelids, herself made a surprising discovery.

"Why," she said in utter bewilderment. "Yer ain't no Chink after all—yer eyes—*yer eyes are blue!*"

In the days which followed, Jewel filled for Wang Hai that emptiness in his life which had so oppressed him with the constant fretting of obscure longings. There was, for instance, the glad brightening of her face at first sight of him, and her ready appreciation of the gifts he brought her: Slippers for her slender feet, gay embroidered gowns from China, a set of windbells for her window, flowers in quaint square pots, a necklace of jade . . .

"Wot makes yer so bloomin' good ter me?" she questioned wistfully more than once.

"Benevolence is the first of the Chinese Virtues," he reminded.

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"I hates ter hear yer sayin' things like that!" fretted Jewel. "I don't never think o' yer bein' a Chink!" Spots of color glowed upon her rounding cheeks.

"My respected father is—ah—a Chink, as you say," returned Wang Hai, a slight bitterness quirking his sensitive mouth, that mouth which was Saxon in its expressiveness. "Likewise is my grandfather—ah—a Chink!"

"Yer got those blue eyes somewheres," persisted Jewel stubbornly.

A silence, during which a visible hurt deepened in the blue eyes of Wang Hai.

"Ye're white at heart anyhow," muttered Jewel apologetically, slipping a penitent hand into his.

She was full of these pretty, surprising, affectionate ways, new to Wang Hai, accustomed from birth to the less demonstrative ways of China. A bright head dropped upon his shoulder in swift, casual caress, the unheeding intimacy of interlaced fingers, even, on rare occasions, the whole slight weight of her leaning against his broad chest—all these were constantly surprising and delighting Wang Hai. What he did not perceive as he came almost to dread her irresponsible affection and its power-

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ful appeal to him was that slowly her fingers came to linger where formerly they had merely brushed his, that her shy fugitive caresses were less casual, and that in the frequent: "Wot makes yer so bloomin' good ter me?" was a something of wistful appeal.

Rather he fixed his attention upon the sheer pleasure of watching Jewel slowly fulfill her threadbare promise of beauty. There was about her whole brightening and blooming something of the change in a starving stray taken from the gutter to the warmth of abundant food and shelter and approbation—just the difference between nobody's dog and somebody's well-cared-for pet. The hollows in her cheeks filled out and flushed into faint pink, her eyes were brighter, her lips deepened from faded pink to scarlet. There came to her an assurance instead of a perpetual shrinking, an assurance which was not at all unlike a tender boldness.

And then, one night after Wang Hai had spent an evening making clear to this waif of an alien race all the dim longings which beset him, Jewel stopped him when he moved to withdraw, standing before the door with outstretched arms, her eyes wide in the soft glow of the lantern which shielded the fly-specked

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light, the breath of excitement panting through her scarlet lips.

"Wang . . ." she said unsteadily, "there's you an' there's me an' nobody carin' wot becomes o' us. I'm wantin' yer ter stay. . . ."

"But . . ." stammered Wang Hai. Then, with exquisite gentleness, "I understand that you are grateful, Little Flower, but gratitude is not a rock upon which a man may wreck the edifice of honor he has reared."

"*Grateful?*" Jewel gave a choking little laugh. "I'm lovin' yer, Wang!" Then, in the face of his look of disbelief, "How could I be helpin' it? Ain't yer been comin' here night after night a-fillin' me up with pretty tales? I ain't at the goin' ter school age any more, Wang. An' yer been good ter me. Nobody ain't ever been that good ter me before."

"I am, as you say—ah—a blooming Chink!" he reminded gravely.

"Not with those blue eyes!" denied Jewel. "An' wot difference does it make? I tell yer, I'm lovin' yer." A pause, which the gravely considering Wang did not break.

"Was it fer this yer pulled me outer the water, Wang?" urged Jewel. "Just so's yer could pull the heart right outer me an' step on it!"

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Before the appeal in her flushed face, the quivering of her lips, the straining of her outstretched arms, Wang Hai capitulated.

"Beloved Little Dear One!" he said softly, lips against the glory of her hair, in him an overmastering tenderness which lent reverence to both tone and clasping arms alike. "Your short life has been one of trouble, but never will Wang Hai add anything of sorrow to it."

Altogether it seems rather a pity that Sen Yeng should have chosen the very next day to break to Wang Hai the news of his approaching marriage, and that, with the customary secrecy of the Chinese, he should have waited until negotiations had gone too far to break off before mentioning the marriage to Wang Hai.

"Myself and The Little Bald One Who Has Mothered You have decided upon your marriage," he observed to Wang Hai over the morning rice which they shared. "Your bride is already upon the waters—a maiden of China, chaste, beautiful, and accomplished, daughter of my old friend, the taotai of Soochow. May she bear you many sons and quickly."

Upon the dreams of Wang Hai, filled with the

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sweetness of Jewel against his breast, her murmuring voice whispering enchantment into his ear, the words of Sen Yeng broke like the impact of a hostile breath against a shimmering bubble, shattering them into iridescent bits.

Then, surprisingly, Wang Hai who had not opposed the wish of his father regarding the sea, raised a faint defiance in behalf of Jewel.

"I do not wish to marry," he protested.

"Man does not attain by himself, nor woman by herself," intoned Sen Yeng placidly. "But like the one-winged birds of the children's tale, they rise together."

A nausea of repulsion against the raven-haired bride with her full-lidded eyes, her docility, and her satiating obedience claimed Wang Hai, exulting in the flame which beat in Jewel, and in that thirst for freedom which eschewed bondage except at the hands of the beloved.

"You are very old and wise, O My Father," he said rebelliously. "So old and so wise you have forgotten how the heart of youth beats in springtime."

"No man ever grows so old he forgets that thing," disputed Sen Yeng, his own thoughts going back to the dead Chinese Lily. "Yet love, which is a producer of happiness, can like-

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wise bring a rice bowl overflowing with bitterness. Be obedient, for in that way peace and contentment lie."

"But . . ." persisted Wang Hai unhappily.

Sen Yeng raised a ponderous hand. "It is arranged," he stated, and in his tone was a finality which silenced Wang Hai.

Throughout a day weighted down with misery, Wang Hai performed his duties, receiving goods, unpacking them, making out invoices in his scholarly hand both in English and Chinese, his thoughts far from the familiar tasks his hands accomplished so expertly.

Jewel . . . how would she take this news? And he could not deceive her!

"Between those who love must ever be perfect truth, else that love dies as surely as a rose smitten with blight!" he murmured wretchedly to-himself. And then: "Truly, as my honorable parent has said: Love which is a producer of happiness can likewise bring a rice bowl overflowing with bitterness."

At night, when he was free, he went to Jewel, his feet lagging from very unwillingness to break the spell of enchantment which had redeemed his days from emptiness to a glowing assurance of being loved and needed.

"*Lover-boy!*" greeted Jewel happily against

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his breast. And then, instantly: "Yer ain't glad ter see me!"

"Unhappy things have I been reflecting upon," explained Wang Hai.

"Wot's up?" inquired Jewel simply, anxious eyes upon his.

"My honorable father has arranged for me a marriage. Even now the chosen bride is upon the sea."

"Marriage . . . bride?" whispered Jewel, drawing away. "I—I don't get yer, Wang. Ain't yer mine? Yer ain't thinkin' I'm goin' ter share yer with any black-haired, yeller-skinned doll? Yer wouldn't be leavin' me now, Wang?" Her instant jealousy was pitiful, stirring Wang to reassuring tenderness.

"Could you share what is altogether yours, Little Butterfly?" he soothed.

"Then there's nothin' in this marriage talk," sighed Jewel in relief, relaxing against his chest. "But yer had me fair scared."

"Beloved Little Plumblossom," said Wang Hai sorrowfully, "though you hold my heart between your two small hands, yet must I marry this bride of my father's choice. Always among our race must a son obey his parent."

"Ain't yer got no rights o' yer own?" inquired Jewel sharply.



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"No," said Wang Hai somberly, thinking back to his frustrated love for the sea. "In China it is the parent—not the child—who rules."

"Yer don't love me!" cried Jewel passionately, reading something inexorable in his face. "There ain't no honor among men anyhow, white or yeller!" Tears ran down from her flashing eyes, her face whitened. "Yer don't love me an' yer never did!" she stormed. "Yer was just a-foolin' me with yer soft talk. An' I hates myself for lovin' yer—*you*, with yer lyin' blue eyes. Yer ain't no different from all the rest o' the male brutes wot loves ter hand out a rotten deal ter us skirts! An' I'm never wantin' ter see yer ugly face again. *Me*, wot was too good to fall fer a white man, fallin' fer a yeller one! *Gawd!*"

Quietly, with a passion of sincerity pulsing in his steady voice, Wang Hai made it very clear that to him Jewel was the one ray of light dawning upon a life clouded with darkness, that to him the mere patter of her footsteps was more grateful than rain upon parched corn, that she was of himself that other half which makes the perfect whole . . .

But Jewel, lapsed into the futility of hysterics, did not heed his words. And finally

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Wang Hai, with many a backward glance at Jewel flung face downward on the low bed, his heart wrung with pity for her drooped mouth and tear-stained cheeks, moved toward the door.

"Didn't yer say yer loved me?" reproached Jewel sobbingly. "Didn't yer say as how yer wouldn't bring trouble an' sorrow ter me——" A peal of angry sobbing laughter pursued him as he went out, reaching even to the ears of the discreetly curious Madam Kwei Ling.

And there the whole matter might have ended, with Jewel sobbing into her crumpled pillow whole nights through, with Wang Hai going through his duties in a daze of misery, and the unwanted bride sailing toward Melbourne, except for a chance visit of Wang Hai to Nat Hong Ku, his grandfather.

To Nat Hong Ku, esteemed as a poet in his gay youth, and revered as a philosopher in his riper years, belonged the ability to read the distressed minds of his fellow men.

Making his grandson hospitably welcome with offered refreshment of scalding hot tea and cloying sweetmeats, he addressed himself tactfully to the preparation of a small cube held from the point of a pin in a tiny fizzing blue flame.

"Many times have my eyes beheld your spirit

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straining at the heel rope of your body, Beloved Grandson . . . yet never more than to-day," he said in his gentle voice, kind eyes upon the young face opposite.

And then, the expected confidence not forthcoming, he continued:

"Rumor has it that you are paying court at the feet of a goddess with hair of gold . . ." A pause. "You love this woman of an alien race?" he questioned in a tone free of blame.

His knowledge did not surprise Wang Hai. To Nat Hong Ku were known all things which happened in The Street of a Thousand Delights.

"I would that the River of Souls yawned for me!" he said desperately.

"That . . ." sighed Nat Hong Ku shrewdly, ". . . is the voice of unhappiness speaking." A pause while he regarded the opalescent smoke rolling away from the cube.

"Strange that one born of such great happiness should end in the throes of unhappiness," considered Nat Hong Ku. "And yet perhaps, after all, not entirely strange. I, who am thy grandfather, loved a woman of an alien race . . . and she died. My daughter, The Chinese Lily, loved a man of alien race . . . and she died!" A pause.

"Truly is the thief in the night stealing of his

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neighbor's plenty to be condemned," reflected Nat Hong Ku. "Yet what of the thief stealing the living years of a life and coining them into terms of service and obedience where none are due?"

Shrewdly he awaited answer from the startled Wang Hai, and when none was forthcoming, he proceeded leisurely, inhaling deeply from the now ready pipe with its gilded tassels.

"To me are you my grandson," said Nat Hong Ku gently. "To The Chinese Lily were you her son; but to Sen Yeng with his three chins sleeping on his breast are you nothing at all!"

"Sen Yeng is not my honorable parent?" stammered Wang Hai, his eyes alive with dawning hope. "Then if he is not my respected father . . ."

In that instant it seemed to him he glimpsed a straight and shining path leading to the sea, with at the end of it—Jewel.

"Thy mother, The Chinese Lily, loved a blue-eyed rover of strange seas," explained Nat Hong Ku with something of sadness. Then, regarding the blue eyes of Wang Hai: "O Foolish Young Man, often in the garden are planted trees of plum and cherry . . ." he said. "But always is the fruit of the plum plum

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and of the cherry cherry! Whence came those eyes of blue to a son of Sen Yeng?"

Whereupon, for the first time, was the story of The Chinese Lily told to the son she left behind her.

"I am an old man," finished Nat Hong Ku equably. "And when the years of my wisdom are accomplished, I shall ascend the dragon. And at that time you, as my grandson, will mourn. Yet because on that distant day I wish a mourning sprung of affection and gratitude and *not* of obedience, I choose to give you now of the wealth which is mine. For, when all is said, I am an old man and my wants are few."

A look of utter content and peace crossed his face. He closed his eyes.

"A wise man knows that he can hold only what is truly his own," he murmured to the departing Wang Hai. "But it is a thing the esteemed Sen Yeng has not yet learned."

Later he said the same thing to Sen Yeng.

"Thy son who is not thy son is taking wings like a freed bird," he informed the embittered Sen Yeng.

"And because of that flitting I shall lose much face," complained Sen Yeng querulously. "Tomorrow we shall have a bride yet no bridegroom."

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"Consider the years in which Wang Hai has been a dutiful son and not the years in which he will no longer be thy son," admonished Nat Hong Ku, "for always a wise man regards his gain and not his loss."

"But for you, O Meddling One, Wang Hai would have remained my son," accused Sen Yeng.

"To me is Wang Hai my grandson; to my daughter was he her son; but to you, O Owner of Three Chins, is Wang Hai nothing at all!" observed Nat Hong Ku gently. "And, Fool, it is written in the beginning that a man can hold only what is his own."

Timidly May Ling, the plump little wife, sought to pour oil upon troubled waters. "In China is your unmarried nephew, Wing Chun," she pointed out. "Let him marry this bride and be to you as a son—a son without the blue eyes forever yearning for other ways and other lands."

"It shall be done," agreed Sen Yeng, brightening. "For a mere woman your words are full of wisdom."

"Always is the fruit of the plum plum and the fruit of the cherry cherry," murmured Nat Hong Ku, turning away. "Moreover, as I grow older and more full of wisdom, it appears to

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me that the world is full of sadness, wherefore it seems to me that where the gift of happiness can be extended, it should not be withheld. And I doubt not that Wang Hai, my grandson, is happy."

In which Nat Hong Ku guessed shrewdly. At that very moment Wang Hai knelt worshipfully beside Jewel, lying dejectedly on the low bed.

"I have returned, O Fairer Than Jade!" he cried ardently.

"Go back ter yer yellor-skinned bride!" retorted Jewel sullenly, her words denying the telltale evidence of hollow eyes and wan cheeks. "I'm not wantin' ter see yer ugly face again."

"Yellow-skinned?" Wang Hai made gay pretense of surprise. "The skin of my bride is whiter than milk; her hair is like the gold of summer sunlight . . ." Gently he caressed her bright hair with a tender hand.

"Does yer mean it?" gasped Jewel, abandoning her pride. "Oh, Lover-boy, does yer mean it?"

And then, seeing in his misted eyes the blessed assurance of his freedom, she laid a wet cheek thankfully against his.

"Those things I said . . ." she sobbed. "I wasn't meanin' them, Lover-boy. It was just that I loved yer so!"

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"I know, Little Flower," agreed Wang Hai understandingly. "Love turned back upon itself is expressed in terms of hate."

And then, holding tightly to him all that power of stormy emotion and pathetic capacity for feeling which was Jewel, he repeated his promise:

"Nothing of sorrow shall I bring to your already sufficiently troubled life . . ." promised Wang Hai, his blue eyes very intent.







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**T**HE hyacinths bloomed that morning in the quaint scarlet dragon painted pots on the casement window of Wong Ting Fu, great starry plumes of purple and rose and blue and white opening surprised eyes upon the warring elements of their surroundings and shouldering aside into insignificance the less beautiful dwarf orange tree and budding narcissus beside them. An odd room indeed, that of Wong Ting Fu: scarlet curtains flaunting in the soft morning breeze; upon the floor a rare old rug from China blending faded tones of gold and blue and royal purple. An English chest of drawers displaying upon its polished mahogany surface an American razor, a bronze Buddha, and a collection of tiny tasseled pipes. Over in a corner a black satin screen embroidered in apple-blossoms and tall gold storks. In still another corner a narrow iron bed covered richly with a carelessly thrown bit of priceless embroidery. Against the wall a bookshelf upon which the sayings of the ancient Chinese philosophers and

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the Lord Gautama Buddha jostled those of the Christian Christ. And, dominating all these, the tall, emaciated, dignified presence of Wong Ting Fu himself, long slender wrists half hidden in his black satin sleeves, aristocratic ankles in snowy silken white emerging from immaculate black velvet slippers.

A strange person, Wong Ting Fu, born a Manchu prince, educated at Oxford, England, and combining in his suave, dignified self the civilization of the far East and the learning of the West. The steps by which he sank from his high estate to that of keeper of a six bunk opium layout in Melbourne were as varied as the contents of his room high above the sights and smells of that street so euphoniously termed "The Street of a Thousand Delights," and undoubtedly beneath that slow descent into degradation was the soul-snaring influence of poppy smoke, the secret vice to which Wong Ting Fu made whole-hearted surrender. For, as he himself so candidly said to an appreciative audience: "A splatter of mud upon the robe of chastity is a vexing matter, yet is a deluge of mud something quite different, since who shall say where the mud begins and where it ends?"

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Which sally, urbanely brought forth, invariably elicited chuckles of approval from the sordid clientele of his establishment, behind the closed doors of which bits of human wreckage drowned in contented lethargy.

But in this story, which is the story of Wong Ting Fu and Rosy May, blind daughter of English Annie, the tragic Odyssey of Wong Ting Fu has no place. There remains only to be considered the fact that, standing alone in his pride of race, his intellect, and his education, in a district peopled mainly with Cantonese, sturdy river or country men risen to a dogged prosperity in this new land of promise, Wong Ting Fu the Manchu was a very lonely man, finding in the difference between his present life and his former greatness an all but unbearable contrast.

He was lonely this particular morning as he bent above the hyacinths, inhaling their perfume with an exclamation of delight, remembering perhaps with his poppy-misted brain other blooms in other lands.

"O Little Buds of Beauty!" sighed Wong Ting Fu, stretching sinewy yellow hands above them. Then, because in the vanished days he had been a poet and a scholar, he lifted a two-

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string guitar from the floor, twanging it to a melancholy, sentimental tune:

“O loveliness which is mine,  
Soul of a thousand perfumes——”

sang Wong Ting Fu in the morning sunlight, in his not unpleasant, exquisitely modulated, slightly flattened voice.

Presently he went down the rickety stairs and out through the green doors so diligently and patiently—and so fruitlessly—raided by exasperated Melbourne police into the sights, the smells, and the clamor of the Street of a Thousand Delights. Past fat Ah Ling, the food merchant, past the peacock feathers and gilded chandeliers of the restaurant of Hong Fong he went, stepping carefully over puddles deposited by a recent rain, his brown, luxuriantly lashed eyes resting indifferently upon sights his misted brain scarcely recognized.

“Wong Ting Fu the Manchu!” said a stout, brown, heavy-legged Chinese to his neighbor in the doorway of a fruit and vegetable shop. “Lo, how are the mighty fallen that a cousin of the yellow Emperor rubs elbows with the lowly!”

“Ahi!” laughed the other maliciously. “If a fleet horse be hamstrung can a mule not excel him?”

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"Even so!" agreed the other, sucking in his thick lips appreciatively.

Passing rapidly along that street which might have been lifted bodily from China, from the balconies of which gleamed furtive faces with drugged eyes or came the high, shrilly scolding voices of forbidden women, Wong Ting Fu paused before the door behind which dwelt English Annie and her daughter, Rosy May, the blind girl.

English Annie herself opened the door, her good-natured face, still unpainted, showing a sickly white in the clear morning light, her peroxided hair in customary disarray, one hand holding the neck of her frowsy dressing-sack together.

"Late this morning, ain't yer?" she demanded sharply. "And Rosy's that restless she's been calling fer yer constant."

"I was delayed," explained Wong Ting Fu in his exact English. "This morning the hyacinths bloomed and I stopped to admire their beauty."

"Yer bloomin' hyacinths!" sniffed English Annie good-naturedly. "Ain't I got as pretty a flower bloomin' here as anybody ever saw?"

"It is true," assented Wong Ting Fu.



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A pause. Wong Ting Fu made as if to pass on into the inner room, but English Annie put out a slightly trembling hand and caught him by the sleeve with urgent fingers.

"Wong!" she said, and swallowed, wetting her dry lips with a nervous tongue.

"There is perhaps something I can do?" he inquired courteously.

"Not fer me!" denied English Annie. "Fer yerself and her, Rosy."

"Yes?" smiled Wong Ting Fu, heavily fringed eyes upon her shrewdly.

"All this time we been a-livin' on yer money, me and Rosy——" stammered English Annie.

"It is nothing!" reassured Wong Ting Fu quickly. "The joy of watching a flower grow to beauty has sufficed."

"Gawd in Heaven couldn't a been kinder!" choked English Annie. "And I'm grateful, Wong. But Rosy's near a woman grown now. It ain't goin' ter be easy keepin' things from her any more fer all she's blind. Keepin' ugliness away from her ain't goin' ter be easy no more!"

"Perhaps not," agreed Wong Ting Fu thoughtfully.

"Only yesterday I took her to the dock fer a bit o' sea air, her bein' so white and all," said

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English Annie anxiously. "And a sailor from *The Ireland Queen* comes up ter us and—well, yer *know*, Wong, it ain't easy fer me to make anybody respect a girl o' mine. I—I had ter tell her he was crazy, what with his loud talk and his ugly words." A pause. "She's pretty, Wong—too pretty ter be safe with the likes o' me!" concluded English Annie heavily.

A silence. Then: "Why don't yer take her, Wong?" asked English Annie timidly. "Yer could keep her safe, our little flower—I can't!"

A sudden and revealing light in the deep brown eyes of Wong Ting Fu, although he said nothing.

"Me, I've a chance ter go back ter the old country," pleaded English Annie. "But I can't take Rosy. Between us we've kept her clean, Wong. I can't be a-takin' her back inter all that scum!"

"She knows no more of ugliness than a lily knows of the mud from which it springs," said Wong Ting Fu slowly. "But——" He lifted one thin yellow hand, inspecting it meaningly.

"She's *blind*; how's she ever goin' ter know?" urged English Annie eagerly. "Yellow men, white men—how's she ever goin' ter know? And if yer yellow on the outside, Wong, yer blamed white at heart!"

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"She will never know," assented Wong Ting Fu. "But——"

"Can the likes o' Rosy be a chooser?" demanded English Annie with bitterness. "And there's worse things, Wong, than marryin' a yellow man!"

Behind the sudden upheaping bitterness of her tone was a pitiful indictment of all that fantastic sordid life which lay behind her, a sudden reminiscence of an orphan asylum in England with long lines of gray-clad, pig-tailed children; of a cheap lodging-house with interminable steps to be scrubbed by a tired lonely little slavey; of a stray bit of kindness tossed to a lonely overworked girl; of a sudden glowing satisfaction in being somebody's dog instead of a stray; of a first step into the mud of dishonor through love; of a further sinking through necessity; and then of a slow determined slaying of soul to provide for a tiny child with unseeing eyes. For, as she herself said often: "I couldn't be lettin' her go intèr a Home, could I, me bein' raised that way myself and a-knowin' just how bad it was!"

Later, much later, when the innocence of Rosy was becoming a problem, came Melbourne and the beneficent, unseeking kindness of Wong

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Ting Fu, from the very first moment his eyes had chanced across her in the restaurant of Hong Fong, shielded from the dubious sights around her by the blindness of her eyes. "Little Flower Growing in the Dark" he had called her in a sudden gush of pity. Even after the pity had subtly blended into love he continued to call her that.

Wong Ting Fu roused from his meditation. "Who knows—ah—that it will be agreeable to the Little Lotus Bud?" he inquired.

"It's yerself that's been blind all these days!" sniffed English Annie. "Rosy's soft on yer, Wong. Ain't yer been kind ter her? Ain't yer spent hours and hours a-tellin' her pretty stories with her a-readin' herself as the her-oine and you as the he-ro? Gwan! I'm thinkin' she's figurin' yer second only ter Gawd Almighty!"

Faint color came into the nearly white cheeks of Wong Ting Fu.

"She loves yer; she'll be happy with yer," insisted English Annie. "And she'll be safe with yer! She'll be a good wife fer all her bein' blind—it ain't the worst thing in the world to have a blind wife, Wong, if bein' blind keeps her thinkin' yer a bloomin' king!"

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"No," agreed Wong Ting Fu slowly. "As you say—ah—it isn't the worst thing in the world."

Passing on to the inner room, he stopped in the doorway for the heart-stirring throb of sheer delight he invariably experienced with his first sight of Rosy May. She sat upon a couch gorgeous with rich satins and heaped with gay pillows, her small white face turned wistfully toward the door. Heavy, amber colored hair hung around her frail shoulders, the sightless eyes were of clear, dark blue shaded by long, curving lashes, the slender hands and feet, so necessary to the Oriental ideal of beauty, were slimly perfect. And when she called to Wong Ting Fu, hesitating in the doorway, there was in her tone a rapture of adoration few men, white or yellow, have lived to hear.

"Wong!" she called in happy delight, lifting slender arms in the blue satin coat which covered her. Although she did not know it, the coat and all the other beautiful things with which the room was crowded were the gifts of Wong Ting Fu.

"I am here, O Beloved Little Princess!" said Wong Ting Fu tenderly, advancing and seating himself on the floor beside her. Gently he took one of her small white hands in his own yellow

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one, contrasting them with something of regret.

"It seemed so long to-day before you came!" she reproached wistfully in the faultless English he had so painstakingly taught her. "And without you it is always dark and lonely."

"To-day the hyacinths bloomed," he told her pacifically. "And because of that it is an auspicious day and I come with a gift in my hands." Carefully he laid in her eagerly reaching palms a necklace of purest green jade, cunningly ornamented with gold feathers. "See, Little Lotus Bud, it is green, a color of which, poor Little Jasmine Flower, you have no knowledge. Yet green is a color which is cool, like the breeze from the open sea or the tinkle of falling water."

"I see it!" cooed Rosy May in delight. "Always I can see things when you tell me of them. And now tell me of the hyacinths and of that country in which you were a prince!"

And because in the days of his first youth Wong Ting Fu had been a poet, sitting beside the raptly listening blind girl he painted pictures for her with carefully chosen words—pictures of gardens filled with plum and cherry blossoms; of temples with mellow bells and scarlet robed priests walking in the twilight; of the court of the Emperor with its gayly clad cour-

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tiers; of sampans floating upon great rivers; of rice fields with black crows winging slowly above.

"I see it—I see it!" cried Rosy May in ecstasy. "Always you can make me see what *you* see!"

And Wong Ting Fu, thinking of the ugliness in which his life was spent, smiled a smile sadder than any gush of tears.

"If I could but see!" grieved Rosy May plaintively. "If I could but see *you*, Wong."

"If you could but see!" agreed Wong Ting Fu placidly, looking down upon the small white hand so closely clasped in his yellow one. "Yet listen well, Plumblossom, for I have news for you to-day."

"Tell me first how beautiful I am," commanded Rosy May rebelliously.

Gravely Wong Ting Fu complied. "Your beautiful hair is sunlight prisoned in a web of silk," he said obediently. "Your eyes are bluer than sapphire seas beneath June skies, your mouth as softly red as summer roses——"

"Ah!" sobbed Rosy May passionately in sudden revolt. "What do I know of sunlight or of blue skies or of red roses?"

"It is true," agreed Wong Ting Fu sorrowfully. "Yet are you so beautiful, O Little

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Mourning Dove, that you hold my heart between your two small hands and all that heart is filled with your beauty!"

Rosy May clapped her hands. "But that—that I understand!" she cried gleefully. "For that, Wong, is feeling, not seeing, and it is what I feel for you. Even the blind can feel!"

A long silence. Wistfully she turned her face up towards his. "Are you displeased, Master of My Heart?"

Gently Wong Ting Fu gathered into his arms all the beauty, all the sweetness, all the pathetic wistfulness which was Rosy May. "We are two lonely ones, O Flower Which Blooms in the Garden of My Delight," he said in his poetic way. "Wherefore shall we be, each to the other, all in all."

And that night being their wedding night, they sat cheek to cheek in the casement window beside the blooming hyacinths, waiting to see the first sun rise upon their marriage, insuring happiness.

"I am happy, Wong," whispered Rosy May. "Yet if for one tiny instant I could see *you* . . ."

"See, my Jewel Without Price, the sun is rising," returned Wong Ting Fu gently, holding her slender hands out into the warmth.



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"It comes to warm the earth, to bid the flowers grow, to ripen the fruit, to bring beauty to the world—all these things have you told me!" sighed Rosy May. "And what the sun is to the earth you are to me, Beloved Master, for what am I without you?"

"It is true," assented Wong Ting Fu, his brown eyes misted with tenderness. "And because of that all things beautiful will I give to you—and nothing which is ugly!"

He kept his word in the days which followed, did Wong Ting Fu, once a prince in the land of cherry blossoms and tolling temple bells. For the sake of Rosy May he even eschewed the liliated pipe which had sapped vigor from his limbs and strength from his misted brain, so that gradually he came back to something of his former strength and keenness of wit, giving the credit whole-heartedly to Rosy May.

"You are the strength of my soul, the breath of my nostrils, O Pearl of Great Price!" he would say, enfolding her in his arms.

And: "Love of My Life, what would I be without you?" would ask Rosy May simply.

Under the tender shielding care of Wong Ting Fu and the secure knowledge of his love Rosy May herself bloomed to surprising beauty.

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Color flushed her pale cheeks, the blue unseeing eyes sparkled with health. It was the delight of Wong Ting Fu to see her passing happily from one to another of his treasured possessions, touching them delicately with an exploring finger, or to watch her moving around in the tiny garden he built for her upon the roof. Hyacinths, dwarf pine trees, Chinese tulips, frisas nodding in the sun—it was a very perfect but tiny garden. But as Wong Ting Fu said with reason, Rosy May would never know how tiny.

"Tell me about it," Rosy May would urge, laying delicate finger tips upon upturned petals. "What color are these, Wong?"

"Blue—like your eyes, Plumblossom," Wong Ting Fu would laugh, looking down upon the hyacinth blooms. "And yet not so blue!"

Or, on still another day: "What have you seen to-day?" Rosy May would urge wistfully.

"Great ships have I seen coming in to the landing dock to-day," he would relate in his precise English. "Ships from distant countries bringing wonderful things: silks and satins and spices and strange foods and things which make music . . ."

"I see them!" would sigh Rosy May happily.

So, in spite of the dire predictions of the dwellers in the Street of a Thousand Delights,

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the marriage was happy, that very happiness proving a source of vexation to some of those prophesying to the contrary.

Sun Yat the Soothsayer even protested openly in the resort known as The Gathering Place of the Most High, giving challenge to that happiness as he cast down his painted fans in an attempt to discover omens unfavorable to this outlandish marriage.

"A flower plucked from an alien vine gives forth bitter perfume," he said boldly to Wong Ting Fu himself.

"Love," retorted Wong Ting Fu with contempt, "is a thing passing the understanding of such as thou. For I ask you: Is understanding a dog to come at the whistle of the unworthy?"

"But two things and two alone are females born for!" argued Sun Yat sullenly. "The washing of pots and the bearing of men children. Yet neither of these has thy bride accomplished."

"Since we are—each to the other—sufficient, wherefore is the need of two becoming three?" returned Wong Ting Fu indifferently. "In China the little wife walks always six feet behind the master, yet my little wife, being, as

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you say, blind, walks by my side—and therefore are we closer!”

Sun Yat narrowed his eyes to a malicious slit. “O Young and Foolish Brother,” he said politely, “never has a man so loved a woman without exposing to his enemy his secret weakness.”

“When the enemy comes, Most Highly Respected Elder Brother,” returned Wong Ting Fu equably, “Wong Ting Fu the Manchu will protect his own!”

But in giving forth this challenge so confidently and in so readily accepting the charge of Rosy May, Wong Ting Fu overlooked the fact that possession of a rare jewel cannot be concealed, however humble its setting. And that, furthermore, extolling of the virtues of that same jewel is directly calculated to breed emotions of covetousness and envy in the breast of the hearer.

Rumors of the beauty of Rosy May spread through the Street of a Thousand Delights like flame through prairie grass, leaving a spark here and a spark there, and creating in the breast of Yoh Kee, proprietor of The Gathering Place of the Most High, a veritable blaze.

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He was far from being a prepossessing person, was Yoh Kee, who came to Melbourne from Canton when Sun Lee, the former proprietor, died in the odor of great sanctity and his body was shipped back to China in state, enclosed in a handsome metallic coffin highly ornamented with crimson dragons, to be decorously followed by twenty mourners dressed in white, with tiny balls of wool representing tears suspended from their hatbrims, accompanied by ten Buddhist priests dressed in scarlet, to its final resting-place on a slope carefully chosen with a view of pleasing the departed spirit with its esthetic possibilities.

With his swollen body on absurdly tiny legs surmounted by an enormous full moon face denuded of eyelashes and eyebrows, Yoh Kee embodied in his unattractive person a mingling of the vices of both yellow and white races. Openly he professed an admiration of the customs of the white race, clothing his body in flashy black and white English checked suits, wearing upon his huge head an English derby hat—for which both races laughed at him. But because of the property inherited from the honorably deceased Sun Lee, he was accepted in the Street of a Thousand Delights as a man of substance and therefore entitled to due respect.

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And if, sometimes, it was whispered that once, in the living-rooms above The Gathering Place of the Most High, through sheer wanton temper Yoh Kee beat a slave girl to death, or that in that black past behind him, upon which occasionally Yoh Kee's braggart tongue turned a sinister searchlight, were deeds the mere relating of which would suffice to send chills of horror down an Occidental backbone, these were things never repeated within the hearing of the Melbourne police.

To the ears of Yoh Kee, degenerate, murderer, and superbrute, therefore, came whispers of the beauty of Rosy May, inciting a passion of envy which was fanned to consuming flame by a chance sight of her tender white face, one perfect evening, when Wong Ting Fu was taking her down to the waterfront to sit, hands clasped idly in her lap, unseeing eyes turned out over the gently rippling water.

"Ah!" said Yoh Kee aloud, standing in his ridiculous black and white checked suit and derby hat, looking after the disappearing Rosy May. "The words of Wong Ting Fu indeed hold a measure of truth! The matter of sightless eyes is of little moment compared with such beauty. And there are, moreover, times when sightless eyes could prove of advantage in a

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wife——” An evil smile twisted his ugly face into greater repulsiveness.

To Sun Yat the Soothsayer he confided his reflections later that same evening.

“I have seen the little white wife of Wong Ting Fu,” he told him, small eyes narrowed to a slit of contemplation. “And her face is that of a lily floating upon the dark waters of a pond . . .”

“She is blind,” pointed out Sun Yat with a shrug of his shoulders.

“ . . . a lily floating upon the dark waters of a pond!” repeated Yoh Kee.

Then, suddenly: “Listen well, Soothsayer, while I confide to you that which Wong Ting Fu the Manchu has himself forgotten, but memory of which burns like an unextinguished flame in my breast: Once, long ago, in China, did Wong Ting Fu steal from my waiting arms a bride because of her foolish tears and protestations. Wherefore did I cause her pretty throat to be slit from ear to ear so that it gaped like a crimson mouth, spilling forth her insignificant life. Yet because Wong Ting Fu himself has gone unpunished is there a stain upon my honor. First will I clear my honor by destroying Wong Ting Fu, and then to his spirit shall come the mewling of a blind kitten!”

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"Wong Ting Fu has sworn to protect his own," pointed out Sun Yat, his own eyes narrowing maliciously. He would not further the plans of Yoh Kee by a single overt act, nor on the other hand would he hinder them by so much as a warning, his craven soul already rejoicing in the discomfiture of Wong Ting Fu in whom he jealously recognized a nobler being.

Yoh Kee smiled a smile which was a revelation of cruelty. "Was I not a killer of men in China?" he demanded. "And is not the advantage mine in that Wong Ting Fu knows not his enemy?"

"Even so!" agreed Sun Yat.

There came, then, a beginning of evil days for Wong Ting Fu, when every enterprise to which he turned his hand rebounded upon him disastrously and during which he became slowly aware of forces banded together to destroy him.

First an unexpected visit of revenue officers in search of contraband goods—goods which Wong Ting Fu, knowing nothing of them whatever, was naturally surprised to find cleverly concealed beneath the boards of his floor. It cost him a staggeringly heavy fine, together with a sharp warning, that altogether unwelcome visit of the revenue officers, a fine which left



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Wong Ting Fu counting his resources with a tiny line of worry between his curved brows.

On another evening a party of quiet Orientals, apparently sunk deep in poppy-tinged dreams, became suddenly and amazingly violent, smashing his expensive furnishings and pipes to uselessness, necessitating further unwelcome expenditure. After that surprising evening Wong Ting Fu sat even longer in thought with the line of worry deepening in his forehead. Undoubtedly he had made a powerful enemy, since even in the simplest things he had a vague feeling of powerful forces operating against him. But who?

Then there came that altogether frightening time when Wong Ting Fu, going down the sea road with Rosy May on his arm, was set upon by a gang of roughs from the tramp steamer *Nancy Lee*. And even as he went down under their kicking, stamping boots he heard Rosy May's low moan of utter terror. Only the opportune arrival of the Melbourne police saved the life of Wong Ting Fu from flickering out under those cruelly heavy boots that night. Miraculously, although bruised and beaten, he had no bones broken, and Rosy May he found fallen to the ground in a heap of moaning terror.

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"I am afraid!" she sobbed poignantly as he helped her up.

"Be not afraid, Little Dove Which Nests in My Heart," he soothed. "Have I not promised to you all things beautiful—and nothing ugly?"

And, looking up into the twinkling stars there was in the tone of Wong Ting Fu and in his quiet face a something of challenge.

Once again, with Rosy May on his arm, guiding patiently her uncertain steps, he was set upon by an intoxicated sailor who slapped his face roughly with a coarse: "Take that, yer damned yellor chink—a-takin' up with a white girl!"

And Wong Ting Fu, the blood of princes rioting furiously in his veins, yet remembering in time the perpetual darkness surrounding Rosy May and that the laws of Australia favor the white man and not the yellow, quietly mopped the blood from his bruised cheek and turned away, catching the grimace of chagrin distorting the brutish face before him.

". . . and nothing which is ugly!" repeated Wong Ting Fu to himself through clenched teeth. There was in his heart a sort of dazed bewilderment. All he asked of life was peace and quiet and enough to care tenderly for one

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small blind woman. Yet even this, it seemed, he must fight for—and fighting an unknown enemy was such disheartening work . . .

Then, after a period of suspense had dragged by, and Rosy May was beginning to complain at being deprived of her evening walks by the sea she so loved, came the afternoon when he returned home after a necessary errand to hear his rooms echoing with shrill screams of helpless terror.

In the middle of the tiny garden on the roof he found Rosy May, sightless eyes wide with fright, arms outstretched helplessly.

"Wong Ting Fu . . . Wong Ting Fu!" she sobbed agonizingly.

"What has happened, Little Heart?" he demanded anxiously above the laboring of his lungs.

She sank against his breast with a sob of relief.

"A man . . . here!" she told him in gasps. "He said . . . oh, horrible things, Wong. Never have I heard such things! And I could not see——"

"And then?" insisted Wong Ting Fu, his muscles taut beneath his satin sleeves.

"You came and he went away."

With his long slender hand Wong Ting Fu

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suddenly lifted one of her smaller white ones clenched tightly in the agony of fear. Gently he opened it, freeing carefully a small shred of cloth and a button.

"So!" said Wong Ting Fu very quietly, with something terrible in that very quietness as he looked down at a bit of black and white checked cloth. And once again: "*So!*" said Wong Ting Fu.

Tenderly he guided the trembling Rosy May down the narrow stairs to the room with the casement windows, establishing her on the narrow couch, heaping the scarlet and purple pillows beneath her head, smoothing her bright gold hair gently with his hand, until the quickened breathing of fear changed into that of slumber. Then, and then only, did he go to a chest of carven ebony inlaid with pearl, his groping hand emerging with a short curved blade of keen steel. Contemplatively he regarded it.

"The teachings of Buddha do not hold with killing," he said to himself softly. "Yet by any law and by any creed is it permitted a man to slay to save his honor or to protect his own!"

Then, sitting there in the room with the scarlet curtains, his eyes upon the sleeping Rosy May, Wong Ting Fu prayed long and fervently

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to the Lord Gautama Buddha and afterwards—entirely as an afterthought, that no deity might be unpropitiated—he prayed to the pale Christ of the Christians.

Presently, when the shadows of twilight were filling the room, he awakened Rosy May. "Eat, Little Dove," he commanded, placing upon her knees a tray bearing snowy kernels of rice, preserved ginger, and a nourishing thick soup.

When she had finished he assisted her into a robe of cherry satin embroidered in gold, with ornaments of crystal jade and emerald, last of all adding tiny embroidered slippers and placing flowers in her bright hair.

"And is it a feast day?" asked Rosy May in bewilderment.

"Perhaps for us—who knows?" returned Wong Ting Fu strangely. "And now, Plum-blossom, it is necessary that I leave you for a short time. Sit here by the open window where the waxen frisks are blooming—thus would I hold you in my thoughts until my return. Your robe is red, the color of courage; your hair, the shade of garnered sunlight. Indeed are you beautiful to-night, Little Princess. And because where beauty is thieves come to plunder, so must the arm of Wong Ting Fu be strong to protect the wealth of the beauty which is his!"

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"You are so strange!" whispered Rosy May through aching throat. "I am afraid, Wong Ting Fu."

"Strange?" said Wong Ting Fu tenderly. "Not so, My Rosebud. Being blind, you see strangeness where there is none!"

After which, on his velvet slippers, carefully choosing his way, Wong Ting Fu went to the shop of Nat Hong Ku, wealthy merchant from Soochow, his one intimate friend in the Street of a Thousand Delights.

"O Respected Elder Brother of Great Wisdom!" he greeted him, coming into the little room behind the great store of Nat Hong Ku and seating himself beside the reclining Nat Hong Ku after due exchange of courtesy. "All these things has the Mudturtle from Canton done to me!" Gravely he recited his experiences. "Wherefore this is the problem which vexes me: If this Pudding on Legs slay me, there remains as his prey my little wife. If I slay her to protect her from the pig from Canton, then shall my days be long and empty of meaning!"

"Indeed so!" agreed Nat Hong Ku, emptying his tiny scarlet-tasseled pipe and looking regretfully backward over his own life.

"Yet if I slay the little wife and myself, which

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is permitted as an honorable deed, then is our next life a business of uncertainty: Who knows that we shall be together?"

"Even so!" agreed Nat Hong Ku cordially. "So you have decided?"

"I have decided to slay this fat-bellied frog!" emptying his own pipe with decision.

"Wisely have you decided, Dragon Brood," spoke Nat Hong Ku thoughtfully, his lean powerful face turned toward Wong Ting Fu. "Truly in the nostrils of the worthy, Yoh Kee is a stinking and a reproach! Wherefore, should you—ah—most regrettably fail, I will assume care of your little wife."

Hand met hand, sealing the agreement, and carefully Nat Hong Ku got to his feet. "Wait here, O Cousin to the Yellow Emperor," he bade. "I will send Yoh Kee to you. But I myself shall not be returning, thus avoiding information dangerous both to myself and your august person."

"Even so!" agreed Wong Ting Fu in admiration.

In the shadow behind the door he waited patiently, caressing between his sinewy fingers the bright curved bit of steel, listening to the softly retreating footsteps of Nat Hong Ku.

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And to him presently came Yoh Kee, his greedy stomach already agape for the rare delicacy Nat Hong Ku had gravely promised him.

"O Creeping Slime from the Gutter—O Fat-Bellied Frog!" greeted Wong Ting Fu, slamming the door. "Many things have you done to me and mine, but now—*now!*" Something immense and terrible seemed to emanate from him, eliciting a squeak of fear from Yoh Kee. And then, since even a cornered rat will fight, desperately he flung himself forward into combat with Wong Ting Fu, their shadows mingling in a fantastic mass flickering upon the opposite wall . . .

Just what took place in that back room of Nat Hong Ku is something nobody rightly knows except perhaps Wong Ting Fu, creeping home through the alley shadows an hour later. Certainly the philosophical Melbourne police who found Yoh Kee two weeks later, swollen face upturned in a distant alley, never learned, abandoning the inquiry after fruitless questioning as "just another Chink case!"

Even Rosy May, adored wife of Wong Ting Fu, knows only that Wong Ting Fu returned home on that night, seemingly a little wearied.

Long he stood in the doorway before enter-



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ing, perhaps feeling the give of a huge chest beneath his knee, perhaps still choking beneath the pressure of iron fingers around his throat.

"You are late!" greeted Rosy May plaintively.

"Let us light the lanterns, O Bud of Beauty!" returned Wong Ting Fu, his breath rasping in his throat. "Since for us it is, after all, a feast day."

Carefully he lit tall wax candles before the bronze Buddha and lighted hanging lanterns upon the wall until prisms of scarlet and purple and vivid blue fell across the soft tones of the rug from China.

"Tell me what you saw on your way here," urged Rosy May. And then again, with a trace of wistfulness: "You are late . . ."

"I was delayed," explained Wong Ting Fu, removing his torn and stained coat and replacing it with a finer one. And at something in his voice Rosy May felt suddenly a chill wind blowing across her heart.

"I am afraid!" she cried, beginning to tremble.

Wong Ting Fu gathered her to his heart. "Be not afraid, My Lotus Bud," he soothed. "See, I will tell you what I have seen: On my way here I passed a garden. And in that gar-

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den stood a single flower. A most beautiful flower, Heart of My Heart, unfolding all its beauty in the sun of love. And I stopped to look at the flower, marveling at its beauty. And, My Pearl, I saw then in the heart of that so beautiful flower a creeping, loathsome thing threatening the very life of the flower. So I paused to destroy the creeping thing——”

“And the flower will bloom!” finished Rosy May happily, dropping her bright head against his satin-clad shoulder.

“And the flower will bloom!” assented Wong Ting Fu, looking down into the delicate white face against his breast.

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**“THE GORGEOUS JEST”**





**I**T seems incredible in this day of labor laws, vice commissions, and other palliatives to the misery of the human lot, that Loo Sing Foo should have purchased for a sack of Chinese coins all the beauty, all the sweetness, and all the natural joyousness which was Chia Sung, obtaining her the more cheaply because of the slight infusion of white blood which was her casual heritage.

But this, although the restaurant of Loo Sing Foo with its peacock feathers and fly-specked chandeliers still stands in that street in Melbourne known among the Chinese as The Street of a Thousand Delights, is a story of an alien civilization lying nearer the rising sun, a story faintly redolent of exotic oriental perfumes cut occasionally by the acrid fumes of poppy smoke, yet holding a scattered note or two of pure melody akin to that of some ancient temple bell worn thin with the usage of centuries or the measured chanting of scarlet robed priests intoning in a cloistered garden.

Even the very characters in the story are

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slightly fantastic, like dream figures glimpsed in the instant of waking: Loo Sing Foo the Magnificent, with his great yellow strength in which lay something of the sleek cruelty of a striped jungle tiger; Chia Sung with her pearl white face, her glory of bronze hair, and her wistful, long-lashed gray eyes; Loo Chang Yung with his twisted leg, his gentle voice, and his poetic soul, slaving away his life as a cashier in the restaurant of Loo Sing Foo, his inner self climbing constantly higher in search of the dreams which thronged his poet's brain—all these are vaguely distorted, as if seen through a mist of that same poppy smoke so prevalent in the Street of a Thousand Delights.

Chia Sung came to Loo Sing Foo as his purchased bride, sent by a matchmaker in the Walled City, after her dainty photograph happened to hit the exact center of his angust fancy. Her price was high, a fact at which the thrifty Loo Sing Foo grumbled exceedingly, although to Sun Yat the Soothsayer he boasted of this same price pridefully, disdainfully making clear his disapproval of the laxly raised daughters of the Street of a Thousand Delights.

"Shall I not have a wife reared in the old custom of docility and obedience, yielding trustfully to my guidance and seeing in me all the

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virtues?" he demanded of the interested Sun Yat, strutting back and forth across the floor of the Gathering Place of the Most High, conscious that he had the eyes and ears of his audience. "And what against all these is a matter of a thousand pounds English to a wealthy man like myself?"

"True, O Magnificent One!" agreed Sun Yat soothingly, letting fall his handful of painted ivory sticks and bending down to read the omens of the coming marriage. "Yet the omens forecast no sons from the marriage, and I see a gathering cloud . . ."

Loo Sing Foo, momentarily taken aback, recovered his poise. "Chia Sung is beautiful as the dawn and of extraordinary accomplishment—all these things has the matchmaker guaranteed," he brought out haughtily. "Wherefore it may be I shall love her. As to the other—" he shrugged aside the prophecy indifferently. "Cannot another female body less beautiful give forth life? When Chia Sung shall have most regrettably ceased to delight my days can I not sell her where beauty is desired and sons are not—taking to myself another wife less beautiful but more praiseworthy in giving me the sons of my desire, thus securing to myself a pleasant memory of love and the certainty of a



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son to pray beside my grave?" Proudly he preened himself in his handsome embroidered coat. "For love is a tinted bubble of beauty which, even after its bursting, leaves behind its glowing memory. And, I ask you, what is old age without its memories?" he finished.

A ripple of appreciation ran around the gravely listening circle.

"Truly you are wise, O Younger Brother," murmured Nat Hong Ku the merchant thoughtfully, refilling his ornate pipe, eyes narrowed as he thought back to the love of his early days. "For what is old age without its memories?"

"Yet are the omens unfavorable!" brooded Sun Yat. "No sons . . . *and* a creeping shadow . . ."

Sen Yeng, brother merchant of Nat Hong Ku, his great bulk relaxed comfortably against his cushions, regarded Loo Sing Foo sourly. "The bride with her beauty and her accomplishments may not love you, O Magnificent One," he suggested bitterly, remembering of his own experience a bride who had failed to love where duty bade.

"Am I not The Magnificent?" demanded Loo Sing Foo. "Have not hearts quickened for me since first the shadow of down darkened my lip? Ahi!" He threw his handsome head back,

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laughing exultantly with a flash of white teeth. "It is indeed a matter of whether I shall love the little bride, not the bride love me!"

From where he reclined, Loo Chang Yung, younger brother of Loo Sing Foo, raised contemplative eyes to the strutting magnificence of his elder brother. "And yet," he observed gently, "all this of which you speak, O Peacock Spreading Its Feathers, is not love!"

The eyes of the two met and clashed. "Does a cripple speak knowingly of love, O Foolish One?" asked Loo Sing Foo bitingly.

"Is my heart crippled?" disputed Loo Chang Yung quietly. "Am I not a poet, and does not a poet feel? And is not love a bird which nests in strange branches?"

A roar of approval greeted this salty.

"Truly, the wit of the poet limps not, however his legs be bent!" praised Nat Hong Ku appreciatively, laying a kindly hand on the slender shoulder of Loo Chang Yung.

A flash of sheer fury leaped from the eyes of Loo Sing Foo as he regarded the younger brother he had never been able to overawe with his magnificence. Always, in spite of his own far greater material possessions, in spite of his physical superiority, in spite of his title of The Magnificent, he sensed in the quiet eyes of Loo

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Chang Yung a lurking disapproval which ran perilously close to contempt. There were even times when he had a swift, unsettling intuition that Loo Chang Yung alone saw him as he really was, and that his magnificence was only a cloak thinly shielding him from the recognition of his fellow men. Wherefore, quite naturally, he hated Loo Chang Yung, tolerating him only because he was useful and his labor cheap.

"Some day, O Thorn in My Flesh, will I repay your insolence," he said now to Loo Chang Yung, restraining his fury. "But now—*now* it pleases me better to let my thoughts dwell, as befitting a bridegroom, upon the flower coming from the Walled City to be my bride." A pause, while his eyes ranged contemptuously around the circle of watching faces. "And the bride will love me!" he challenged. "For am I not Loo Sing Foo, The Magnificent?"

"Yet are the omens bad!" murmured Sun Yat as the door closed behind him, wrinkling his ancient forehead. "No sons and a spreading cloud . . ."

Even in the first moment when she stood before him in the center of the room behind his restaurant, a tired, infinitely pathetic little figure huddled above her box of possessions,

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long-lashed gray eyes fearfully seeking his, Loo Sing Foo decided Chia Sung had all the white beauty of lilies dreaming in the moonlight or of a snow-clad mountain peak in the rays of dawn. The matchmaker had not lied in the recital of her beauty; his bargain was good.

In his lordly manner he strutted up and down before her, noting with approval her wealth of bronze hair, her delicate features, the small hands and feet. Undoubtedly her heritage of white blood showed, but not unpleasantly so.

"Am I not magnificent?" he demanded regally of the weary Chia Sung.

"None more so, O Great One!" she returned politely, trying to subdue the trembling of her limbs, yet divining, with some queer prevision of knowledge, the streak of cruelty which predominated in Loo Sing Foo, like a scarlet thread in a bit of dull old tapestry.

"And a husband for any bride, however beautiful?" pursued Loo Sing Foo, demanding his meed of admiration greedily.

"Indeed!" agreed Chia Sung, sucking in her breath courteously.

"And since you are but a woman, a bearer of men children and a washer of pans, great is my condescension in stooping to lay my love at your feet," explained Loo Sing Foo loftily.

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A ripple of emotion crossed Chia Sung's white face. "Indeed!" she agreed, bowing her head submissively.

"And doubtless in return for my condescension you will love me greatly!" finished Loo Sing Foo, stopping before her.

A rush of faint color came and went in Chia Sung's face. "How should I dare?" she returned almost inaudibly. "How should I dare?"

Loo Sing Foo regarded her down-turned face thoughtfully. Had the drop or so of foreign blood troubled the still pool of her docility? "Ah, Little Bud Closed Against the Sun of Love," he sighed sentimentally. "Beneath the warmth of my affection shall you open, expanding into greater beauty . . ."

Into the room came Loo Chang Yung, the restaurant closed, his money box in his hands.

"My bride, O Foolish Younger Brother," said Loo Sing Foo harshly. And to Chia Sung: "My brother, a worthless cripple, who lives by my bounty."

Upon the poetic vision of Loo Chang Yung the wistful, appealing beauty of Chia Sung burst with all the unexpectedness of a rising sun, her weariness stirring him to pity.

"She is tired, O Magnificent One, and weak

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from her long journey," he said in his gentle voice. "Moreover, she is strange in her new home. Permit her to rest in quiet."

The frightened gray eyes met his. Impulsively Chia Sung put out both hands to the owner of the gentle voice. "I am afraid!" she shivered.

Loo Chang Yung took the outstretched hands protectively, marveling at their smallness. "Be not afraid, Little Troubled Heart," he soothed. "Why should there be fear where there is cause for none? Is that not true, O Magnificent One?"

But Loo Sing Foo stood silent, a dark frown upon his handsome forehead, hands clenched in his wide sleeves. Docility, submissiveness, obedience . . . and yet resistance to him, The Magnificent One. Looking from Chia Sung to his brother, tiny lines of cruelty appeared suddenly around his mouth and eyes. "Why should there be fear where there is cause for none, O Younger Son of My Mother?" he agreed silkily.

Royally Loo Sing Foo The Magnificent wooed Chia Sung of the lilting laugh, the tiny feet, and the flower-like hands, heaping gifts prodigally upon her. Jade ornaments for throat, ears, and high coiffure. Silken gowns lavishly embroi-

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dered in scarlet, black, and gold. Fans exquisitely painted and inlaid with pearl. Rare confections in quaint pots and baskets. A victrola with strange Chinese records jostling American jazz. Even, in his determination, he condescended to the singing of Cantonese love ballads in his flat, nasal voice.

All of which was wasted upon the inappreciative Chia Sung. Outwardly obedient, Chia Sung remained as remote in reality as some far away bird skimming the upper cloud circles or a mermaid deep in the caverns of a fathomless sea. Only in the glance which occasionally sought and found Loo Chang Yung was any quality of emotion visible. And always, when Loo Sing Foo put his inevitable question in one of its many forms, came back her unchanging answer.

"And perhaps, O Most Beautiful, the ice surrounding your heart is beginning to melt in the warmth of my love?" would query Loo Sing Foo smoothly.

And: "Are there not mountain tops upon which the ice never melts, however warm the Sun, O Magnificent One?" would retort Chia Sung demurely.

Meanwhile the dwellers of The Street of a Thousand Delights recognized the dilemma of

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Loo Sing Foo with restrained glee, tongues tucked slyly in yellow cheeks, eyes discreetly downcast as he passed, only—as he well knew—to open wide in derision upon his retreating back.

And once, in the Gathering Place of the Most High, Sen Yeng the merchant dared to question him openly. "You have found your bride—ah—entirely satisfactory?" he said purringly.

"She has the beauty of a budding rose," retorted Loo Sing Foo sturdily. "Could any man ask more?"

But his pride suffered mightily beneath the titter which smote his ears as the door closed behind him, and beneath the understanding smile in the quiet eyes of Loo Chang Yung.

Slowly the situation waxed intolerable as he redoubled his efforts to batter his way into the stubborn heart of Chia Sung.

"Write for me a song, O Poet," he commanded regally of Loo Chang Yung. "A song to melt a heart of stone."

And Loo Chang Yung, smiling a strange smile, wrote a song for Chia Sung of a caged bird beating against bars.

In his flattened, nasal, sing-song voice, Loo Sing Foo intoned the song, gratified to see tears in Chia Sung's almond-shaped gray eyes.



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"You are moved, O Tender Little Heart?" he questioned eagerly.

"By the song," admitted Chia Sung. "Yet is the song not your song, O Magnificent One. For where there is no heart there can be no song. And in place of a heart you have——" she paused provokingly.

"Yes?" demanded Loo Sing Foo eagerly.

"A picture of your august self," finished Chia Sung.

Slowly the red of anger flushed Loo Sing Foo's haughty face. With one snap he broke the quaint guitar over his knee.

"Not thus is the manner of a bride raised in the habit of obedience," he said stormily. "Perhaps unkindness will soften the stubborn heart which fails to yield. Henceforth not the gown of silk, the many cushioned bed, the costly food, nor even the gift of freedom, until the dawn of reason dispels that willful stubbornness."

Into the half-closed eyes of Chia Sung came the familiar glint of resistance.

"As you wish, O Magnificent One!" she said softly. And from that very softness Loo Sing Foo received a chilling premonition of defeat.

Days followed, during which Chia Sung, look-

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ing out through shuttered windows at the clutter and untidiness of The Street of a Thousand Delights, sank into despair and her scarlet lips faded to delicate pink. And yet the strange something which stiffened her to unyielding resistance persisted. Poor little Chia Sung, a thousand times on the point of tearful capitulation, failed to comprehend that the strange stubbornness was part of her mixed inheritance, coming down to her in devious and untraceable ways from ancestors facing stake and faggot unflinchingly for the sake of upholding a principle. In her despair she sobbed protest against this quality of spirit from which her weaker flesh rebelled, and Loo Chang Yung, passing her door in the quiet evenings after the restaurant closed, felt his heart expand with pity.

In his gentle way he undertook to lighten her punishment with unexpected surprises—now a packet of appetizing food to enrich her meager fare; now a flower tossed hurriedly through the grating in her door; once a queer puzzle game to make long hours shorter; sometimes—when he was certain Loo Sing Foo was far away—a whispered snatch of conversation.

And finding in the gentleness of Loo Chang Yung a something she had never known before, the stubborn heart of Chia Sung turned

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to his gentleness as naturally and inevitably as a flower opening to sunlight.

There came, then, an evening when Loo Chang Yung, pushing his hand through the grating with a budding flower, felt soft lips pressed against it and withdrawn in a panic. After which he went, in a daze of happiness, and sat upon the roof beneath the stars, living again that soft pressure upon his hand, his heart alternately reëchoing with the name of Chia Sung and hot with bitterness against Loo Sing Foo.

Once again, on the very next day, Loo Sing Foo, finding the situation intolerable to his pride, and feeling his overstrained patience slipping, put his inevitable question to Chia Sung.

"And doubtless, O Pearl of Great Price, you are beginning to love me greatly?"

Chia Sung, her ears filled with the sound of a gentler voice, made her unchanging answer with the familiar shudder of repulsion. "How should I dare, O Magnificent One, how should I dare?"

Only this time the mighty arm of Loo Sing Foo struck out in exasperation, crushing the words back against her lips, and she fell to the floor, a bruised little huddle, not even under-

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standing in that last moment of consciousness whence came the strength to defy him.

There the irate Loo Sing Foo left her, neglecting to lock the door in his rage, so that it was Loo Chang Yung who came at length and lifted her to the narrow couch beside the wall, bathing the white face gently until the gray, long-lashed eyes opened upon him.

"I want to die!" said Chia Sung pitifully through bruised lips. "I want to die!"

"O Little Mourning Dove!" remonstrated Loo Chang Yung. "Life may yet hold many things for you."

The bruised lips twisted into a bitter smile.

"There is, for instance, love . . ." explained Loo Chang Yung softly, a tenderness shining forth in his disturbed face.

"Love is not for the purchased bride of Loo Sing Foo, the Magnificent." Her fluttering hands went to her breast. "Of what use, Loo Chang Yung, is a woman in this world of men?"

"In the days when the two-inch shortness of my leg seemed a great trouble," said Loo Chang Yung in a low tone, "it seemed to me a cripple was of no use in a world of straight-legged men! Yet now I think differently. Other worlds, other ways; other races, other customs. See, Little Bird Beating Its Wings

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Against Bars, there is a land where the little wife walks beside her husband instead of ten paces behind; where the little wife is served first at table; and where the beauty of the wife comes before the strength of the husband. In this land is a religion which thinks first of the soul and not of the twisted body, a religion for the troubled at heart . . ."

"Ahi!" exclaimed Chia Sung eagerly. "Tell me of this way of thinking."

"It is called the Jesus way," said Loo Chang Yung simply.

Then, sitting there holding her fevered hands in his, in his quaint colorful speech, Loo Chang Yung endeavored to make clear something of the ideal of the Carpenter of Nazareth. "And because it is a faith for the troubled in heart, it called to me," he finished.

"It is like the tales told to little frightened children which soothe them to quiet sleep!" marveled Chia Sung, breath fluttering through parted lips. "Yet when I look at you, Loo Chang Yung, I understand. For always I see a straight and shining you, and never the leg which limps."

"O Little Vine Which Twines Around the Pillars of My Heart!" said Loo Chang Yung, with the sentimentality of a Chinese poet.

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"But there is Loo Sing Foo!" reminded Chia Sung, tears in her gray eyes. "If but you and I together could travel the Jesus way, Loo Chang Yung . . ."

"As you say," agreed Loo Chang Yung with a sigh. "There is the Magnificent One."

And, looking up at that very instant, Chia Sung barely suppressed a scream of sheer terror as Loo Sing Foo advanced into the room, a something sinister exuding from him which chilled the blood in her veins.

"Am I not magnificent?" demanded Loo Sing Foo gutturally of Chia Sung, grinning with rage.

"None more so!" acknowledged Chia Sung through white lips.

"Then, O Little Flower Which Blooms for Another, it is—ah—most unfortunate that you have failed to love me. For shall Loo Sing Foo the Magnificent sip honey from the cup yielded to a cripple? Not so! Wherefore"—he paused, prolonging the moment of suspense—"wherefore I will sell you where the beauty meant to delight a husband shall be a source of joy to many!"

"You do not dare!" cried Loo Chang Yung furiously, his gentle eyes aflame.

"And wherefore?" challenged Loo Sing Foo

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with a shrug. "For of what use is a flower without perfume; a lamp without a burning wick; a setting without a jewel? Or perhaps, Fool, you have wealth with which to pay the purchase price?" Maliciously he waited while Loo Chang Yung's downcast face proclaimed his poverty. Then, indifferently, he strutted toward the door.

"Of what use to lock the door of a cage when the singing bird has flown?" he questioned, as he left the door open behind him.

"Do not grieve, Little Mourning Dove!" urged Loo Chang Yung, raising Chia Sung with her tear-stained face and pitifully drooping mouth in his arms.

"You heard?" Frantically her hands beat against his breast. "O One Who Holds My Heart in His Hands, you will not let this thing be?"

A pause. Incense spluttered in its burner. Chia Sung placed her lips close to his ear. "*Kill him!*" she whispered breathlessly. "If you love me—then kill him!"

A longer pause. Anxiously she hung against him, eyes imploring.

"Should I raise my hand against the other son of my mother?" questioned Loo Chang

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Yung sorrowfully. "Not thus is the Jesus way, O Breath of My Life!"

"And am I nothing?" sobbed Chia Sung poignantly.

Quaintly, in his old world, stilted manner, Loo Chang Yung made it very clear that she was the breath of his nostrils, the beating of his heart, the pulsing in his veins.

"*Then*," argued Chia Sung passionately, "if these things be so—kill him!"

Unhappy eyes stared into unhappy eyes. Loo Chang Yung held Chia Sung closer.

"Believe with me, Chia Sung," he murmured. "Only have faith and all will be well."

Another pause. And then, of a sudden, all the hardness went out of Chia Sung. She relaxed in his anxious arms.

"Because I love you, I will have faith," she said sobbingly. "Yet should the Jesus god fail, then will I send my soul to rejoin my ancestors. For how could I, loving you, rest in the arms of another?"

"Chia Sung!"

"Without sight of your face I should be as a flower deprived of sun," sobbed Chia Sung.

After he had gone she fell upon her knees beside the window, looking up to the quiet stars,



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fiercely tormented by an absence of symbols to cling to. "O Jesus god!" said little Chia Sung, tears rolling down her white cheeks. "I, Chia Sung, will believe—yet strain not that belief beyond the point of breaking!"

Hurrying through the sights, the smells, the puddles and littered refuse of a population indifferent to laws of sanitation, Loo Sing Foo stopped at the house of one Sun Lee, ostensibly a purveyor of rare spices, to the initiate a killer of men, plying his profession honorably, not for personal reasons, but purely as a matter of business.

Placidly sipping scalding hot tea from a blue Canton bowl, he received Loo Sing Foo with surprise. "Greeting, O Magnificent One!" he greeted politely. "My humble dwelling is honored by the dust from your august footsteps."

Indifferently Loo Sing Foo shrugged aside his courtesy. "You are a killer of men," he said bluntly to Sun Lee.

"I am a cleanser of honor, a restorer of face, a riddance to enemies, a payer of revenge!" protested Sun Lee, his face creasing into a thousand wrinkles. "My hand is old yet steady; my feet are slow but noiseless. I know a poison

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which leaves no trace for the bothersome foreign devils with their meddling ways."

"Yet," said Loo Sing Foo significantly, "suppose a wise man had two enemies, and the one died suddenly, leaving, say—ah—some article by which the foreign devils would conclude the other had killed him?"

"The foreign devils would surely kill that other!" returned Sun Lee cheerfully, finishing his bowl of tea.

"Thus ridding the wise man of two enemies, and causing him to gain face as the originator of such a satisfying revenge," finished Loo Sing Foo, laying down a small pouch which chinked, beside which he placed a knife.

Sun Lee pursed his thick lips thoughtfully. "The knife?" he inquired.

"Is the knife of my brother, the cripple," explained Loo Sing Foo.

"A most estimable young man!" praised Sun Lee politely.

"Who will perhaps not be a cripple in that world to which the quick justice of the foreign devils will speedily send him."

"A kindly thought!" purred Sun Lee. "And the other?"

"There is a merchant, one Hong Fong, whose manners have at times annoyed me," informed

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Loo Sing Foo graciously. "Beside which I covet his greatly inferior eating-house."

"Ah!" agreed Sun Lee. Then: "In the matter of a double killing such as this the price should be double."

"I have paid you well," frowned Loo Sing Foo. "Do then thy work well, O Gorging Pig!"

Sun Lee sat studying the door which closed behind the back of his visitor with mingled emotions, the ruffled feathers of his pride angrily resentful.

"Truly, O Arrogant One," he muttered to himself, "I should prefer to sink this knife in your haughty back. Yet is business business, and I am an honorable man——" Greedily he proceeded to the pleasant task of counting the sack of coins. This highly agreeable performance finished, he lifted the knife thoughtfully.

"Ahi!" he said aloud, thinking of Loo Chang Yung and his gentle, courteous ways. "Truly it is a pity for such a gentle throat to be stretched by the rope of the foreign devils. Yet is business business!"

And in his turn, seeking the consolation of a sympathetic listener, Loo Chang Yung went to Nat Hong Ku, wealthy merchant and wearer of the title, "Most Wise."

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"O You Who Have Been A Lover," he greeted, sinking down into the heap of cushions indicated. "Listen to the tale of one who is also a lover, and then bury the tale deeply in your heart that the merely curious may not read."

To the interested Nat Hong Ku, his narrow, powerful face wreathed in fumes which served only to clarify his keen Oriental brain, he related the story of Loo Sing Foo, Chia Sung, and himself.

"And she loves me, a cripple!" he finished exultantly, his voice trembling with emotion. "Many things have I lacked in life; Chia Sung would repay for all."

"Why not—ah——" suggested Nat Hong Ku delicately, having no love for the overbearing Loo Sing Foo.

Loo Chang Yung shrugged. "It is not the teaching of the Jesus god," he explained.

"Ah!" A silence, broken only by the sizzling of an opium cube. Nat Hong Ku considered. "For me the old customs and the old gods," he said finally. "Yet you are young, and to the young is ever the need of change. Which is as it should be, since before progress must come change." Again he considered deeply. "Be not disturbed, O Younger Brother," he coun-

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seled. "For who can know to-day what is on the knees of the gods for to-morrow?"

Vaguely cheered, Loo Chang Yung took his departure. And once again Nat Hong Ku considered long and deeply.

"A man grown big with arrogance is like a pig's bladder puffed over-full of air," he brought out profoundly at last. "Needing but the prick of a pin to cause his collapse into nothingness."

Clapping his hands, he summoned a servant. "I would speak with Sun Lee, the Killer," he commanded.

He sat on, thinking of certain happenings in his own past, until the fat face of Sun Lee obtruded upon his vision.

"Greeting, O Highly Respected One!" he said courteously to Sun Lee. "Have then a pipe with me, a scarlet pipe with tassels of gold as befitting your station."

The several chins of Sun Lee quivered with pleasure as he responded with fulsome flatteries which Nat Hong Ku cut short.

"You are a killer of men," he observed gently.

"Indeed so!" assented Sun Lee pridefully. "A most necessary occupation, O Most Wise."

"Indeed so!" agreed Nat Hong Ku politely.

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"Yet for a man of such delicate sentiment and understanding, a most difficult profession."

"Business is business!" shrugged Sun Lee deprecatingly.

"Yet where business can be combined with sentiment?" suggested Nat Hong Ku.

"That is indeed a rare opportunity!" admitted Sun Lee, smacking his thick lips over a tumbler of Chinese rice whiskey cut with anise.

"Then listen well," commanded Nat Hong Ku urbanely. And in his dreamy way, in his exquisitely modulated Oxford voice, he proceeded to tell the childlike Sun Lee the unhappy love tale of Loo Chang Yung and Chia Sung, dwelling upon the pathos of their situation until tears rolled down the fat cheeks of Sun Lee.

"And so, unless Loo Sing Foo is—ah—removed, they must be forever separated," he finished.

With the name of Loo Sing Foo, however, Sun Lee recalled his profession.

"It is sad," he agreed philosophically. "Yet is business business."

"Nobly said," concurred Nat Hong Ku keenly, depositing a fat sack bursting with coins at his feet. "And a good deed well done

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should be handsomely repaid." Then, as Sun Lee rose to his feet: "My own daughter I shut into a cage . . . and she died!" he said softly. "Wherefore will I give the gift of freedom to another little caged bird, and perhaps her spirit will be pleased."

In a dazed stupor Sun Lee found his way to the street, clutching in his fat hands the bulging sack of coins, a thinner and less weighty sack of coins concealed in his wide sleeve, his fuddled wits grappling with the problem presenting itself to a man of scrupulous honor.

"If I kill the merchant and Chang Yung is hanged, then will I frustrate the purpose of Nat Hong Ku, who is a mighty man!" he reasoned unhappily. "Yet if I kill Loo Sing Foo, and not the merchant, I cannot, as a man of honor, retain the money of Loo Sing Foo, *nor* could I return it, Loo Sing Foo being—ah—regrettably dead!"

Then, in one swift brilliant conclusion, he achieved a solution, thoughtfully hefting one sack and then the other in his pudgy hands.

"Business is business!" said Sun Lee aloud thriftily. "And the sack of Nat Hong Ku is more than twice as heavy—wherefore shall I slay Loo Sing Foo. And the sack he has given to me will I, in turn, give to the lovers as a

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bridal gift—which is doubtless what the spirit of Loo Sing Foo would prefer. Wherefore will my honor be clean, the pathway of the lovers clear, and I will gain standing with Nat Hong Ku, who is, when all is said, a man of power. Ahi—what a gorgeous jest! The money which was to have bought a necklace of rope for Loo Chang Yung, the cripple, shall buy him as a necklace the soft arms of a bride!”

Then, standing there in the bright moonlight, before setting out upon business which involved leaving Loo Sing Foo in an alleyway with his arrogant face bruised into the mud and his magnificence sadly dabbled, Sun Lee laughed great peals of Gargantuan laughter until tears ran down his fat cheeks and his fat stomach quivered like a jelly pudding.

A passing Chinaman in a black skull cap, his arms folded deeply in his black cotton sleeves, paused to inquire the cause of his merriment.

“I laugh, O Brother to a Toad,” said Sun Lee with dignity, “at a gorgeous jest . . . a most gorgeous jest!”

But prudently he refrained from further explanation.





**“MEI-LI THE BEAUTIFUL”**





**I**T was Moy Yeng, who had loved her, who found Mei-Li the Beautiful floating face upward in the silver waters of the sunken pool, agitated goldfish flashing away to either side of her in swift red flight, upon her slim throat the violet imprints of ten powerful fingers.

And because, even in that moment of violent death, Mei-Li the Beautiful was still fair, Moy Yeng, who was both poet and artist, disregarded his grief to pay involuntary tribute to that deathless beauty.

"Mei-Li . . . always the Beautiful!" he sighed sorrowfully, looking downward to where silver rays of moonlight impacted against that floating face. And then: "Yet is beauty a troubled possession!"

In which, without knowing it, he epitomised the short career of Mei-Li in a single pithy sentence.

Looking at the tragically brief life of Mei-Li from its very beginning in the yamen of a mighty official of China to the moment when

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that same life flickered out in a gasping, choking struggle in the waters of the sunken pool, the single fact of her amazing beauty stands out starkly like the scarlet thread coloring and influencing a bit of dull old tapestry.

Every crisis in her life was produced and decided by her beauty, which was inescapable and which dowered her from birth. The various people influencing her destiny were themselves influenced by that beauty, reacting to it, each in their own fashion, with emotions of jealousy, envy, hate, or love, according to his or her capacity.

She was, in the very beginning, the daughter of a powerful Chinese official and his concubine, unwanted in view of her sex until the fact of her promised beauty endowed her with a prestige of her own which reflected back upon the mother, a circumstance of which the concubine was not slow to take advantage.

"See, O Lord of My Heart," would purr the slave girl contentedly to the official. "Regard what beauty has my child which is also thine. Like a lotus bud newly unfolded, or a willow tree in spring . . . Ahi! Nowhere in all this land is such a one!"

And: "Does not this child come rightly by her heritage of beauty, O Most Fair?" would

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argue the official politely. "Is not the beauty of her mother like to the full moon floating in midnight skies, or to a flowering cherry tree?"

"Such compliments for a lowly one purchased for a handful of Chinese silver!" would protest the slave girl then, leaning back happily against the broad shoulder clad in silken robes of state, the fragrance of peach-blossom reaching him from her shining black hair, carmined lips drooping into a childish pout of pleasure.

And, listening, all the content in the heart of the Great Wife of the official, whose beauty was *not* like to a full moon floating in midnight skies, curdled into the acid of jealousy.

"Truly the clucking of the slave woman over the beauty of this little female dog does offend my ears!" she said to herself more than once.

Wherefore, at her command, the child was stolen at dawn from the side of the sleeping mother, to be thrown into the nearby river.

But that same beauty which had so incensed the Great Wife softened the heart of the coolie carrying out her instructions. Standing upon the muddy banks of the swirling river, he gazed dubiously from the tiny upturned face in his arms to the eddying depths of water.

"The fate which yawns greedily for its victim

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will not be cheated," reflected the coolie to himself sapiently. "If this child be meant to die by drowning, then die by drowning it will, regardless of me. Wherefore it is unnecessary for my hand to assist in the accomplishment of destiny. Thus, by refraining from the actual act of drowning, will I gain both in peace of mind and in standing with the gods for a deed of mercy!"

So thinking, he shrugged aside responsibility by leaving the infant in its wrappings beside the road which followed the river, returning to the palace where the slave girl, awakening to an emptiness of shielding arm, was destroying the peace of dawn with her lamentations.

Eventually, under the influence of coercion the mere relation of which would be horrifying to Occidental ears, the coolie confessed his crime. But by this time Mei-Li had vanished entirely, and, sitting beside a window facing the river, watching buzzards wheeling in the air and thinking of the horrible fates which had possibly overtaken the frail blossom of her flesh, the slave girl drooped and pined and finally died.

By the side of the river road, along which he was fleeing the just wrath of the Dowager Empress because of his unwise political activ-

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ities, Chang Yung, once a Chinese gentleman learned in matters of Chinese art, chanced upon the bundle of wrappings containing Mei-Li. "A girl child!" he exclaimed in disappointment, and moved a few steps onward.

Then, remembering the promised beauty of that tiny face, Chang Yung, gentle of heart and lover of all things beautiful, was irresistibly drawn back, resuming his flight with Mei-Li cradled in his arms.

The act which seemed sheer folly proved the height of wisdom. Because of the child in his arms the watching soldiers of the port failed to recognize in Chang Yung the distinguished political rebel, and he gained a ship sailing for Australia.

In Melbourne, in The Street of a Thousand Delights, which duplicates with its sights and smells and its lack of sanitation the cluttered streets of China, Chang Yung, taking the price from the quilted money jacket which he wore, purchased a shop from a countryman desiring in his old age to return to the land which had given him birth.

The rooms above the shop he furnished gorgeously with lacquered furniture, quaint flower pots bearing insignia of dragon and chrysanthemum, embroidered screens, painted beds



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heaped high with pillows of purple and gold and crimson, the finest of dishes and copper cooking implements, and, lastly, a shrine with its attendant incense pots.

Behind the shop he laid out a courtyard which might have been lifted bodily from that land he had so loved with its tiny pagodaed teahouse, its trailing vines covering rough stone walls, its paths tracing between gorgeous flower beds, and its sunken goldfish pool.

And here, for fifteen years thereafter, Chang Yung lived in great peace and tranquillity, respected by all and happy in his business of selling things of beauty. From one to another of his rare bits of porcelain or carving he would pass in ecstasy, now raising a piece of clear, spinach-green, translucent jade to admire the matchless shading of color, now holding up a bit of rare embroidery to catch the light on its faded tones, now examining with a thrill of sheer delight a tiny Ming figurine cunningly fashioned by fingers long since turned to dust. And sometimes, with a feeling akin to reverence, he would strike softly upon a gong filched from some ancient temple, reconstructing from its mellow chimes the scene of its original use: The immense figure of the Goddess of Mercy perhaps, with its thousand yellow painted hands

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and row upon row of candles, its gray-robed old priests, its petitioning women worshipers, and the wailing beggars without the temple.

And then, for a brief interval, the heart of the exile would be heavy with hunger for the banished land with its superstitions and its cruelties, its streets cluttered with cheap life, its rivers crowded with sampans, and its gardens fragrant with plum and cherry. But always across the drift of his memories the thought of Mei-Li the Beautiful would cut like a pungent and arresting perfume, dissipating them into mist.

Something of the ecstasy he had for his rare objects of art blended subtly in his feeling for Mei-Li. She was so perfect to look upon, little Mei-Li. No sculptor in pink marble could have given her more delicate lines or a more tender modeling of dainty limbs. Straight dark hair piled high over a delicately broad forehead, tiny ears, hands, and feet, dark slanting eyes and a crimson flower of a mouth, the meekness of the slave mother and the fire of the haughty official . . . all these were Mei-Li the Beautiful.

"Truly in the land from which we came your feet would have been bound to insure their smallness!" would sigh Chang Yung, gazing upon the untrammelled Mei-Li dancing around

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the garden in her satin trousers. "And yet, watching you dance, I am reminded of tall lilies swaying in the breeze."

She was reared in the cloistered seclusion of a maiden of old China, little Mei-Li, in ways of modesty and decorum. Not for her the freedom of the noisy streets with their inevitable harvest of unsavory knowledge. For, as Chang Yung, smoking in company with his associates at The Gathering Place of the Most High, often said: "She is as beautiful as the pink of unfolding dawn . . . and as unspotted with the taint of evil."

Just to look at Mei-Li with her gowns of gay brocade, her ornaments of pearl and jade and beaten gold, her perfumes of sandalwood and musk and jessamine, her shining hair smoothed into elaborate coiffure, her skilled fingers drawing from silver lute or quaint guitar the melodies of the Far East was to see a vision lifted from the courtyard of some old Chinese castle. Chang Yung, in his hunger for the banished land, never tired of seeing her dance beside the sunken pool in her gleaming satins, or of hearing her sing in her clear sweet voice some saccharinely sweet melody of flowers blooming, blue skies, and a pair of lovers.

Sitting placidly in the shadow, his thin yellow

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face calm and peaceful under its black skull cap, his body decorously clothed in dark satin as befits a man of substance, white silken socks protruding from black velvet padded slippers, Chang Yung would sit and dream beneath the magic of that limpid voice, refilling his tiny tasseled pipe time and time again from the pot of rare tobacco beside him. Opium he did not smoke, it being, in his scholarly estimation, merely a means of winning dreams for those who of themselves had none.

So, all in all, Mei-Li was an unceasing joy to him, amply repaying his investment in time and money. Every luxury he could procure was hers, and when sometimes she would protest against his extravagance, he would hold his head a little to one side like some kindly old bird, and retort:

“Sufficient to the jewel must be its setting—and I ask you: Where is there jewel more worthy of its setting?”

But if in his careful rearing of Mei-Li Chang Yung followed the customs of old China, in one thing he departed from ancient custom. When rumor spread a report of the beauty of Mei-Li through The Street of a Thousand Delights, bringing suitors in plenty for her hand, always, disregarding the advantages of the proposed

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match, Chang Yung made the same reluctant answer to each:

"When the fruit leaves the tree, then is it gone forever . . . wherefore should it be allowed to ripen fully upon the tree!" he would say in his gentle way. A pause. And then: "Moreover, some things there are in my stock of wares which I sell to any purchaser. But other things there are—and which I have loved the best—which I do not sell until the right purchaser comes. For always is there the rightful owner for every thing of beauty. And what have I more beautiful than Mei-Li the Beautiful?"

Because Chang Yung was highly respected in The Street of a Thousand Delights, patiently the suitors bided their time—all except Hugh Sing, the importer.

He was both rich and powerful, the tall, lean, wrinkled Hugh Sing, with his flat forehead, his tiny pig eyes spraying out fanwise into lines, and his enormous, sinewy, yellow hands. In the Sing tong of which he was head, all members rose to their feet when he entered and remained standing until he was comfortably and deliberately seated upon his heap of cushions. Quite naturally, since he was accustomed to deference

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in all things, Hugh Sing was irked by the edict of Chang Yung.

"Truly," he pointed out with dignity to the inappreciative Chang Yung, "is it an honor for the head of the Sing tong to ask in marriage a girl found abandoned upon a roadside. How know I that the marriage will meet with the favor of the gods? Yet because of her exceeding beauty—which burns in my heart like flame—will I overlook the matter of her ancestors. Moreover"—his desire for Mei-Li overcoming his natural thrift—"will I give you a thousand pounds English."

But Chang Yung, his eyes fixed placidly on a strip of yellow satin covered with Chinese ideographs setting forth sayings of the unknown Chinese philosopher who came before Confucius, smiled indifferently.

"There are in my shop articles not for sale at any price—save to the rightful owner!" he retorted. "Many summers have passed over your august head, O Prince of Merchants, insuring wisdom indeed. Yet is wisdom not appreciated by the young, requiring the savor of maturity for full appreciation. Youth calls to youth, O Most Wise. Mei-Li the Beautiful is but a hummingbird flying in the sun of youth,

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while you, O Highly Respected One, are a beetle courting the shadows of age. And it is the nature of a hummingbird to yearn for a hummingbird. Some day there will be for Mei-Li the Beautiful another hummingbird, a *male* hummingbird, O Most High . . .” His gentle old eyes brooded off into space. He seemed oblivious of the presence of Hugh Sing.

White with rage, Hugh Sing took himself away, to plot and connive in secret, desire for the beauty of Mei-Li gnawing at his very soul.

Another year passed, during which Moy Yeng, nephew of Chang Yung and generously educated at his expense, came from England to help care for the shop and to sit beside Chang Yung, while pretty Mei-Li danced in the moonlight. Together the two young people made music for the gentle old man, the tall solemn young Chinese with his deep brown eyes and his carefully spoken English, and dainty Mei-Li with her dreaming face and her laugh like a cadence of tiny silver bells.

Sometimes, catching the eyes of Moy Yeng fixed upon her, into the heart of Mei-Li would come a dawning glory, causing her breath to flutter with its very sweetness. And Moy Yeng, gazing upon the tender beauty of Mei-Li, would feel in his brain a sudden rush not unlike the

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whirring of a flock of teal into motion, experiencing a sudden dimness of vision. But between the two at that time was only an attraction, a wistful drawing of each to each which, given time and opportunity, would ripen into the love not yet present.

So, in the house of Chang Yung life was very pleasant in those days, but in the dwelling-place of Hugh Sing, with its bare floors, its enamel furniture, and its costly beds hung with scarlet curtains, life was not so pleasant. Madam Ah Tsi, mother of Hugh Sing, and San Me, his wife, no longer in her first bloom, clung together in mutual amity, burying their grievances against each other as the craving of Hugh Sing for the beauty of Mei-Li quickened his temper and hardened his hand.

"Truly," queried Madam Ah Tsi acidly of her son, hitting at his accustomed stinginess, "does thy purse gape with coin eager for the spending? And is not the symbol for trouble two women under one roof? Then wherefore add to trouble by putting *three* women under one roof!"

"Had I mountains of silver, I would give them all for Mei-Li!" retorted the infatuated Hugh Sing, growing more sullen as time passed.

"Truly," complained San Me in secret, "I



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know not whether it be worse if he win this interloper or worse if he fail!" Then, raising her voice to the point of tears in complaint, "Have I not been a good wife? Have I not been the mother of sons to mourn at his grave—long distant be that day! Have I not been docile, obedient, patient—in what have I failed?"

"All these things have you been," consoled the mother-in-law. "Yet are these things as nothing when love enters the heart of a man. For what is past is past. And what is to be . . . will be!"

Whatever his ultimate plans for Mei-Li, Chang Yung did not live to see them fulfilled. Unexpectedly he dropped asleep, sitting in a great armchair, caressing an exquisite bit of carved jade with his thin yellow fingers. From that sleep he never awakened, and in due time, in a handsome metallic coffin, he went back to that land which had driven him forth, and which opened to receive him again into its vast silence, affording him the futile pomp of fifty mourners clad in white and a procession of ten shaven-headed Buddhist priests intoning the virtues of the departed.

And on the very day that Chang Yung went back to China, Hugh Sing, repairing to the Gathering Place of the Most High to enjoy a

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pipe of choicest chandoo, entered there into deep converse with two others of the Sing tong, the brothers Lu.

"I hear the esteemed Chang Yung has ascended the dragon," said Hugh Sing decorously, when the small black cube was sizzling in the blue flame.

"Indeed so," assented the elder brother, a plump little man with beady eyes not unlike the currants in an English bun.

"Before he most regrettably—ah—passed on, he did promise to me in marriage Mei-Li the Beautiful," purred Hugh Sing.

"A most auspicious marriage!" pronounced the other agreeably.

"Yet the nephew, Moy Yeng, not knowing of this promise, may demur," pursued Hugh Sing.

"Wherefore were you and your highly esteemed brother witness to the promise of Chang Yung, it would be most fortunate . . . and worth much money to me."

The eyes of his two listeners met, narrowing swiftly.

"The possession of a good memory outweighs the value of precious jewels!" proclaimed the younger brother. "As clearly as a pond mirrors the bending sky do we remember the occasion of which you speak."

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Whereupon the three fared forth to the shop of Moy Yeng, finding him in ecstatic contemplation of a consignment of rare tapestries.

"Chang Yung, who is no more, and regrettably cannot testify, has promised to me Mei-Li the Beautiful," informed Hugh Sing smoothly, after the customary flowery Chinese courtesies had been duly observed, and the four were comfortably seated on cushions in the room behind the shop.

"*Indeed!*" retorted Moy Yeng thoughtfully. "Yet he made no mention of his wish to me."

"Who can foretell to-day what to-morrow will bring forth?" shrugged Hugh Sing. "Would Chang Yung know that the days of his life were numbered? Moreover"—indicating the brothers Lu—"are these two witnesses of his agreement with me."

"We are witness!" proclaimed the brothers sonorously.

A silence. Hugh Sing took up the argument again. "You stand in place of a son to Chang Yung, who regrettably had no son of his blood to mourn for him," he said softly. "And the first wish of a dutiful son is to honor the command of the dead, thus insuring peace to the departed spirit."

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"It is true," agreed Moy Yeng, frowning.  
"And yet . . ."

Something of the gossip he had heard regarding the shrewish mother of Hugh Sing filtered into his disturbed mind. Involuntarily he thought of the tender beauty of Mei-Li at the mercy of unkind hands.

"It is the duty of a Chinese son to honor the wish of the dead," repeated Hugh Sing inexorably.

And at that, offsetting all the years of his education in a foreign land, the weight of accumulated centuries of deference to the wishes of dead ancestors brought pressure upon Moy Yeng, overruling his personal reluctance.

"If the marriage pleased my uncle, it pleases me," said Moy Yeng politely, but with something of regret pulsing beneath his courteous words.

Palm met palm, sealing the agreement.

After Hugh Sing had departed with his silent witnesses, Moy Yeng sat on in the deserted room, thinking over the coming marriage. Presently he went reluctantly out to where Mei-Li, sitting upon the stone coping of the sunken pool, was throwing bread crumbs to the goldfish.

"Soon must you exchange the snowy gar-

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ments of mourning for the crimson ones of rejoicing!" he said haltingly to her.

The bread in her slender fingers dropped unheeded to the ground. Into the eyes of Mei-Li came a softness. One hand went up to her slim throat.

"Soon you go with your belongings to the house of Hugh Sing, who is, when all is said, a man of wealth and power," continued Moy Yeng.

And then, without looking at her, he knew that all the brightness had vanished from her face.

"I . . . must leave you?" whispered Mei-Li the Beautiful, regarding him with the eyes of a child given a blow where a caress was expected.

"Chang Yung, who was my uncle, arranged the marriage. And in all things must his wish be obeyed," explained Moy Yeng, wondering at his own feeling of guilt.

"I did not think that Chang Yung, after many years of kindness, would prove unkind at last!" said Mei-Li gently.

"Yet must his wish be honored," insisted Moy Yeng, gazing upon the beauty of Mei-Li with a troubled hunger. "We are not as the foreign devils, living for ourselves alone. Always do

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we honor the wish of the dead before the wish of the living."

And then, looking at the clean young strength of Moy Yeng with a sort of wistfulness which held a prevision of the vanished youth and shrunken ugliness of Hugh Sing, Mei-Li flamed surprisingly to words of protest.

"Was I saved from the river for this?" she demanded passionately of the startled Moy Yeng. "Must the life of a Chinese woman be doomed to the hazard of unhappiness from birth? And is love, which is the song of all the world, to be left always to chance when life without love has a grayness like unto a weeping day? How know I if Hugh Sing be young or old, handsome as the dawn, or ugly beyond compare?"

Remembering Hugh Sing, Moy Yeng was moved to pity. "The wish of Chang Yung must be obeyed," he repeated gently.

As suddenly as it had come, revolt died out of Mei-Li, the deeply ingrained habit of obedience reasserting itself. "What is left for me but to obey?" she murmured. "Truly is life a flower with many thorns!"

With hanging head she moved away, and Moy Yeng, watching the drooping figure recede, felt as if in some way he had betrayed a trust.

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"Truly is the path of duty set with sharp stones for the feet of the unwary!" he sighed to himself. "Yet always, beyond all else, must the wish of the dead be honored."

So, in a rented hack decked with crimson, Mei-Li went to Hugh Sing, and with her first glance at his wrinkled face the sense of being cheated strengthened until it overshadowed all else.

Hugh Sing was kind. Moreover, he was generous under the influence of the alien emotion which flamed in his middle-aged breast. Gifts without number he showered upon his bride, delighting in the beauty which so enthralled him. And seeing, San Me his wife, and Madam Ah Tsi his mother, waxed sullen and resentful.

Always Mei-Li was conscious of their unchanging enmity. Their fulsome compliments were spiced with insincerity, their frequent criticisms with the malice of envy.

"He has given to this water-fowl dresses of silk and satin and rare jewels, yet to me, the mother of his sons, has he given nothing at all!" sobbed San Me angrily to Madam Ah Tsi.

Madam Ah Tsi spread her hands in a gesture of resignation. "When love comes in at the door, wisdom goes out at the window!" Placidly she filled a cup with tea sun-dried with

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yellow flowers of jessamine. "And certainly Hugh Sing loves Mei-Li the Beautiful!"

"Her beauty blooms in his heart like some exquisite flower, making him young again!" wailed San Me in a tone of anguish. "And me—I am old."

The slanting eyes of Madam Ah Tsi narrowed. "Likewise am I old," she acknowledged. "But in my life have I seen many strange things. Even have I seen love used as a weapon to destroy the thing beloved! Moreover, though he bar with gold his silver door, a man cannot keep the wife who loves him not."

"You are most wise, O Honorable Mother," returned San Me respectfully, her nimble fingers busy with a strip of fine embroidery. "Yet could thy wisdom rid this house of the hated Mei-Li, then would I hail thy wisdom as greatest in all the world."

In her turn Madam Ah Tsi regarded the pale, red-eyed San Me with something of sympathy. "You have been a dutiful daughter to me," she said, not unkindly. "And it is not right that a mother of sons be pushed aside for a newcomer with beauty, since, after all, more precious in a woman is a virtuous heart than a face of beauty . . ." She filled and drank another cup of scalding tea deliberately. "To him who waits



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comes ever his opportunity . . . even for revenge. Wait, then, O Mother of Sons, for the opportunity which will be ours."

"Seven causes are there for the putting away of a wife!" suggested San Me hopefully.

Madam Ah Tsi sniffed scornfully. "And were there seventy times seven, Hugh Sing in his folly would hold Mei-Li the Beautiful!" She reflected, passing one hand in deep thought over the scalp blackened carefully to conceal her baldness.

"If the door of a cage be left open, will not the caged bird fly?" she brought out at last. And she smiled—a smile which left the watching San Me slightly chilled by its underlying malevolence.

There followed for Mei-Li the Beautiful lonely days in the house of Hugh Sing, when her romantic fancy, fleeing the actuality of Hugh Sing with his wearying compliments and his gloating delight in her beauty, returned to other days and the society of Moy Yeng of the luxuriantly lashed brown eyes and gentle voice. Sitting listlessly, day after day, behind closely shuttered windows, gazing out through a shimmering haze of golden light which revealed indiscriminately the clutter and disorder of The Street of a Thousand Delights and touched the cobalt blue

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of the distant ocean with splashes of silver and rose and emerald, occasionally she recognized the tall, lithe figure of Moy Yeng, following it through the crowds with something of wistful pain.

No longer was there any joy in the elaborate toilet she made each morning, arranging her shining hair in satin smoothness, rubbing perfumed honey upon her white skin and powdering it into creamy whiteness with rice powder before painting delicate circles of unfading pink upon the smooth whiteness. Even in the contemplation of her own beauty there was no longer any happiness for Mei-Li.

And, in his turn, Moy Yeng never failed to gaze up at the shuttered windows as he passed the dwelling of Hugh Sing, remembering Mei-Li dancing in her young beauty beside the sunken pool, and the extinguished gladness of her face when he had told her of the coming marriage.

A time came when Moy Yeng found his garden haunted with memories, and when the poignant thoughts of Mei-Li turned ever more often to the round ball of sleep which has afforded escape to many a Chinese bride.

And Madam Ah Tsi, watching the changing emotions upon the face of Mei-Li, judged the time ripe for interference.

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"Always does my tender heart sorrow for a caged bird mourning its freedom!" she said softly to Mei-Li one day when Hugh Sing was away on a business trip, stealthily regarding the tears coursing down from under the girl's full white eyelids.

Mei-Li failed to reply, and craftily she proceeded. "Moreover, where a bird flies willingly into a cage, who shall be blamed for shutting the door? Yet where the bird is caged by a trick, then is advantage taken unfairly."

"There is a meaning in thy words, O Honorable Mother, which escapes the slowness of my wits," returned Mei-Li heavily.

And then, watching carefully, seeing the sudden rush of angry color in the young face opposite, Madam Ah Tsi related the tale of Hugh Sing's trickery with the witnesses.

"Never did the highly respected Chang Yung mean for you to marry Hugh Sing," she finished. "Many times did he refuse him, saying: 'Always for every thing of beauty is there the rightful owner.'" She paused. "Hugh Sing would be most angry if he knew I told you of this," she finished. "Yet is right right and wrong wrong, and the tongue of a liar forms a noose by which many a wise man has been hung."

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Softly she withdrew, seeking the society of San Me. "Seed have I sown which will bear fruit!" she told the eager San Me. "There remains but to wait."

In which she was entirely right. To the heavy heart of Mei-Li her words brought a storm of emotion, deepening the feeling of having been cheated and betrayed into actual hate of the wrinkled Hugh Sing. Close upon this came a glory of hope: Chang Yung had not meant her to marry Hugh Sing! Perhaps there would yet be escape from this dreary prison, escape from the gloating fondness of Hugh Sing . . . Perhaps in that garden she had so loved Moy Yeng still remembered . . .

Later, on that same evening, Madam Ah Tsi and San Me awaited Hugh Sing, dressed in their best, and with triumph in their bearing.

He came on eager feet.

"Where is my Lotus Bud?" he demanded with his first breath. "Many and rare gifts have I brought to her: Necklaces for her neck whiter than the pearls of which they are made, silks for the beauty of her tender flesh, ornaments for her hair which shames the blackness of the night . . ."

Madam Ah Tsi smiled at him placidly. "More precious in a woman is a virtuous heart

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than a face of beauty!" she replied pointedly. "Mei-Li the Beautiful, after days of grieving, has returned to Moy Yeng who was her lover before she was thy wife."

"Ah!" whispered Hugh Sing, the little veins in his temples swelling into prominence, his small pig eyes glazing over. Again he heard the slightly mocking voice of Chang Yung: "Some day for Mei-Li the Beautiful there will be another hummingbird . . . a *male* hummingbird . . ."

"Wherefore because of this thing does the shining honor of Hugh Sing bear a stain," finished Madam Ah Tsi. The eyes of the two women met. San Me shivered with fright.

A silence followed during which breath came unevenly through the sagging lips of Hugh Sing.

"Honor which bears a stain must be cleansed," he affirmed at last. "Men die, women die, love dies . . ." his voice trembled. "Yet is honor a deathless thing, handed down from father to son . . ."

Deliberately he moved toward the door with a new and terrible decision, contracting his enormous yellow hands.

"Is it not a wise mother who knows her own son?" inquired Madam Ah Tsi composedly of the shrinking San Me. "Said I not that love

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becomes a weapon to destroy the thing beloved?"

"He will kill her!" whimpered the frightened San Me, regarding the carefully painted face of Madam Ah Tsi as if it held a baleful fascination.

"He will kill her," affirmed Madam Ah Tsi indifferently, filling her tiny scarlet tasseled pipe with a single pinch of tobacco. "With his great yellow hands he will wring the life from her reluctant body as easily as I twist a flower between my fingers."

Then, emptying the tiny pipe, and regarding the trembling agitation of San Me with kindly contempt, "Every age has its compensation, O Sheep-Hearted One," said Madam Ah Tsi sapiently. "To Mei-Li was given much beauty, yet to me is given much wisdom. And wisdom is ever a match for beauty."

In that garden Chang Yung had built, Mei-Li and Moy Yeng were together, Mei-Li coming in upon him, the living embodiment of the dream which haunted his evenings: The same wide dark eyes, the haunting smile, half sweet, half sad, the same poignant delicacy of throat and face which caught his heart and melted it into tenderness.

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"Mei-Li!" he cried aloud in wonder.

"I have come back!" she said, with a sob of sheer happiness. And then, holding out both hands to him: "Why have you given me to Hugh Sing?" she demanded reproachfully.

"Because my uncle Chang Yung so willed," returned the puzzled Moy Yeng.

"And if Chang Yung had not so willed?" inquired Mei-Li with dainty coquetry.

"Ahi!" sighed Moy Yeng regretfully.

Mei-Li came closer, walking straight into the arms which involuntarily closed around her, and to him came the perfume of sandalwood from her clinging satins, the scent of peach-blossom from her shining hair, all the mysterious allure which was hers.

"Do you love me?" asked Mei-Li, looking deep into his eyes.

Moy Yeng endeavored to regain his firmness of purpose.

"A Chinese wife does not seek refuge from her husband," he pointed out. "Did the loungers on the street know you were here your name would be a jest upon the lips of the unclean in thought."

"Do you love me?" insisted Mei-Li tremulously. "Am I not Mei-Li the Beautiful?"

And then, stammering, Moy Yeng made it

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very clear that to her beauty his very soul paid homage, that his heart beat in time with the sweetness which was hers, and that to him the world without Mei-Li was but a place of arid waste.

"Ahi!" sighed Mei-Li gratefully, letting her head droop to his shoulder. "These words have my ears long hungered to hear!"

Still leaning against him, she poured out the tale of Hugh Sing and his duplicity, feeling the shoulder beneath her head stiffen into rigidity.

"It is not permitted any man of honor to steal the wife of his friend," said Moy Yeng when she had finished, sucking in his breath sharply. "Yet is it permitted any man to regain what has been stolen unlawfully from him!"

Then, holding to him closely all the beauty which was Mei-Li, he reflected aloud anxiously.

"Long is the arm of the Sing tong, wherefore we must fly beyond reach of that arm. There is, far away, another land, my Plumblossom, a land to which entrance is sometimes denied. Yet by those with money are there arrangements which can be made—"

"And in this land we shall be, each to the other, enough!" murmured Mei-Li happily.



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"And we shall be, each to the other, all in all!" assured Moy Yeng gravely. "And what against this is a matter of rare tapestries, or jade, or houses, or gardens . . . wherefore I will go at once, O Rose of Happiness Which Blooms for Me, to arrange our passage. By the kindness of the Lord Buddha, there is a boat sailing this night . . ."

"Hugh Sing returns to-night," shivered Mei-Li. And caught him suddenly with frantically clinging arms. "Do not leave me!" she implored.

"I go but to return," reassured Moy Yeng. "See, Little Frightened Dove, I go to arrange passage to the new land where we shall be happy . . ."

But Mei-Li sobbed pitifully. "The shadow of something terrible has crossed my heart, clouding the sun of my happiness!" she told him between sobs.

Gently Moy Yeng endeavored to soothe her fears. "Here where we met you will wait for me, My Lotus Bud," he said tenderly. "And memory of thy beauty will speed my returning footsteps. See, Most Beautiful, let me go!"

Reluctantly the clinging hands relaxed. "There is no place you go so distant I shall not follow!" said Mei-Li strangely. "Nor is there

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any wait so long we shall not be together again!" Looking deep into his eyes, she smiled. "For where two are in their hearts as one, then is no separation possible!" finished little Mei-Li softly.

When he had gone, she dropped on her knees beside the stone coping of the sunken pool, watching the goldfish swim lazily back and forth, of a sudden holding up both slim arms to the fullblown moon riding in a tranquil sky.

"Little Sister Moon . . . I am so happy!" sang Mei-Li the Beautiful liltingly. "Never was any one quite so happy!"

But in the very moment of saying it a chill wind blew across her heart, every shadow and rustling leaf exhaling a subtle menace.

Then, gazing down into the clear water of the sunken pool with terrified eyes, she saw reflected there the figure of Hugh Sing behind her, immense and terrible . . .



# CHINA ROSE





O things had Tsing Chung, Chinese sailor in the city of Melbourne, which he loved with a mighty love as he sat cross-day after day upon his table, the round under his black satin skull cap placid, and contented: the long line of honorable tors passed on to other worlds, and Rose, yellow haired, slanting eyed, discontented idling in the lacquered splendor of the he had prepared for her.

both of these loves Tsing Chung was per- s unwise. The ancestors—summed up in a andid bronze tablet to which Tsing Chung ifully rendered daily prayers—had left him hing but a series of obligations in the way perennial respect and consideration. And ncerning Rose, China Rose as she was bet- r known, gossip was rife even in the Chinese uarter, where the names of respectable women are seldom touched upon in polite conversation.

The reasons for this were many, as many, in fact, as the flagrant offenses committed by China Rose in her gay defiance against Chinese

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etiquette. For one thing she walked abroad on feet which had never known the torture of binding, her face in all its bright young beauty bare to the careless gaze of any passerby, rejecting the modest trousers of the Chinese woman in favor of the outlandish, figure-revealing garb of the foreign devils. Frequently she was seen in the pubs of Melbourne deep in conversation with despised females of the alien race. And in a thousand other ways China Rose, in whose reckless veins surged the blood of unknown races, violated the fixed customs of China.

Sedate old Chinamen in wide sleeves averted their eyes when she passed with her light quick step, splendid shoulders squared proudly beneath her plaid jacket. Children, readily absorbing the prevalent gossip and reflecting the attitude of their elders, shook soiled tunics disdainfully at sight of her. And at least once a malicious yellow countryman spat venomously upon the pavement skimmed in her rapid passage.

But China Rose, hearing, only laughed her gay, defiant laugh.

"They hate me 'cause I'm diff'runt," she explained to the worried Tsing Chung. "All these fat ole yella men wanta shut me up so's their fat little ole yella wives won't begin

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hollerin' tuh get out on the streets an' see the sights. An' all those pasty yella women starin' down at me from behind the lattices—*they* hate me 'cause I'm free an' they ain't! Y'see, Ole Socks"—she slapped Tsing Chung gayly upon shoulders rounded from perpetual bending over a length of cloth—"if you're diff'runt, yuh can just make up yer little ole mind tuh be hated—'cause sure as shootin' yuh will be."

"But I love you because you are different," expostulated Tsing Chung, grave eyes upon the willful face and pouting mouth he so worshiped.

China Rose shrugged. "That's another story, Ole Socks."

Then, her spirits flaring to wild exhilaration, she started a noisy record on the talking machine with which Tsing Chung had recently delighted her. "Come on, Ching-a-Ling," she urged. "Let's try a bit of jazz."

Grasping the plump Tsing Chung with her strong hands, she pulled him around the room in a patient stumbling effort to follow her nimble feet. He loved these flaming moments, did Tsing Chung, when her wild humor lifted him high above the prosaic dullness which was his life, in spite of his life, in spite of his secret feeling that they detracted from his dignity. Per-



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haps the very ability of China Rose to mount above the sordid grayness inclosing him was why he loved her so.

Of a sudden, breathless, her mood changing, China Rose let him go, herself collapsing onto the couch heaped high with pillows which stood against the wall, sobbing wildly in one of the sudden abandonments of grief which occasionally visited her.

Tsing Chung, standing above her in troubled concern, touched the heaving shoulders with solicitous fingers. "You are sad?" he inquired wistfully.

And China Rose sobbed out her reason. "There's goin' to be a baby—another little crossbreed like me, Ole Socks."

Then, rebelliously, looking upward at the look of beatific content spreading over Tsing Chung's full moon face, "Oh, I reckon ye're glad enough, Ole Socks. But me now, I'm knowin' wot it means tuh be part white an' part yella, with yer heart pullin' one way an' yer yella skin draggin' yuh another. It's plain hell, Ole Socks, that's wot it is!"

"But you—ah—are yellow," said the puzzled Tsing Chung.

"I ain't!" screamed China Rose in a fury. "I'm white—white—white!"

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"Certainly," agreed Tsing Chung soothingly. "If you wish to be white, then you are white, Rose of My Heart."

But with his hasty concurrence all the resentment dropped away from China Rose, leaving her listless against the gorgeous pillows in her pathetic willful youth and beauty.

"I ain't reelly white, Ching-a-Ling," she acknowledged dispiritedly. "Maybe I look white, but I ain't. Not reelly. An' just that's been eatin' on me all my life. It's plain hell, Ole Socks. Buh-lieve me . . . I *know*."

And she did know, the knowledge dating back to a time when, even younger, she walked the streets of another country, from the clutter and disorder of Pell Street to where the twisted steel structure of the Elevated crosses the Bowery, tight coat buttoned tautly over the slim figure of fifteen, yellow hair arranged in sophisticated coiffure beneath her enormous hat, tottering along on two inch heels in a caricature of the popular walk. Even in those days of thin immaturity she had a strange, exotic beauty, which she was rather more than well able to protect from unwelcome advances.

Mr. Dennis O'Flaherty, upon whose doorstep

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chance—though unkind people hinted paternity—had cast her in a dingy blanket at the tender age of two weeks, applauded her ability to fend for herself.

"She's tough!" he would confide to the cronies haunting his poolroom. "Gawd, but she's tough—that China Rose! She can out-swear me an' I'm no amachoor. An' buh-lieve you me, she packs a wicked wallop in that right arm. Ain't nobuddy goin' ta get fresh with her if she don't want it."

If anybody had whispered to Mr. O'Flaherty of protecting youthful innocence, he would have stared in amaze.

"Ain't she *yella*?" he would have inquired injuredly. "If she wuz white now—but she ain't. Look at them slantin' eyes!"

And in his mind it was all clear enough: One set of rules and regulations for the female of the white species, another for the yellow.

"China" Rose they called her because of her queer slanting blue eyes and the tearose tint of her skin. And as China Rose the report of her beauty spread through Pell Street and the Bowery.

"Honest," said young Bud O'Connor to his side kick, Spike McGovern, in warm appreciation, "there's a *yella* dame walkin' 'round

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here wit' a face at'd knock yuh cold. Reg'lar chicken an' spunky as hell."

McGovern listened thoughtfully. Later he more than listened. He went on a tour of inspection.

There is no denying that with his glaring pink shirt, his absurdly small waist above peg top trousers, and his light topped shoes, Spike McGovern was not bad to look upon. He had, moreover, a deceptive cherubic innocence about his smile.

"Hello, Kid!" he said admiringly to China Rose at first sight of her. "I'm wantin' tuh cop a lil' peach just like you."

The slanting blue eyes of China Rose went from the feet clad in effeminate patent leather to the incongruous strength of the face shaded by a plaid cap. "Beat it!" she ordered, dealing him a playful slap meant as encouragement.

"Game!" praised Spike McGovern delightedly.

Then, some months later, her heart in her mouth, her intense blue eyes beseechingly upon his unconcerned face, a softness about her before which Mr. O'Flaherty would have stared in amaze, China Rose made of Spike McGovern an urgent request as they stood together in the soft spring dusk of a city park square.

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"I—I'm soured on this place 'round here, Spike," she stammered. "The noise, the dirt, the fights, all the rottenness of it."

"Suits me," nonchalantly from Spike. "Wot's eatin' on yuh? Some Holy John been naggin' yuh about yer everlastin' soul?"

"I—I'm wantin' tuh cut all this an' get away somewheres," persisted China Rose, her face working slightly in the darkness. "What say, Spike, we marry an' get away together?" Breathlessly she waited. It was out, the thing she had been nerving herself to say during all these months she had been trying pitifully to tighten her slipping hold on Spike.

Deliberately Mr. McGovern spat at an iron stake nearby. "I ain't thinkin' o' marryin'," he stated with extreme finality.

"But you—me—we—" stammered China Rose through a haze of tears. "We oughta get married, Spike."

Spike narrowed his eyes viciously. "Talkin' church stuff, eh?" he sneered. "Well, what I said goes: I ain't marryin' just now. An' when I do—" he paused provokingly.

"Yeh?" whispered China Rose eagerly, drawing closer.

"When I do . . ." finished Spike McGovern cruelly. "I'm drawin' the color line."

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"But you—but?"

"Sweethearts an' wives is diff'runt," explained Spike loftily.

"But I'm white!" insisted China Rose passionately.

"*You?*" His mocking laugh mounted toward the slim sickle of spring moon high up in the sky. "Don't try tuh come that stuff on me, Rosie-girl. Where'd yuh get those slantin' eyes? Don't the whole town know ye're yella, China Rose?"

Then, patronizingly, "Ye're all right, Rose. An' I ain't as perticklar as some. Just so's yuh don't spring no more o' that marryin' talk we kin travel awhile together. But when yuh talk marryin', then I gotta remember I'm a McGovern, an' the name's never been splashed with just that kinda mud."

A pause which lengthened to awkwardness. Mr. McGovern grew faintly uneasy. "Yuh don't hafta take it like that," he protested injuredly. "Be a sport, Rosie. I like yuh—sure I do!"

But he was talking to empty air. China Rose was retreating rapidly in all the dignity of offended pride. Already her slight figure was only a dim blur in the merciful darkness. And as she went, her eyes were full of tears.

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It was a night she was to look back upon in later years, the night she broke with Spike McGovern. Hour after hour she battled in the darkness with the stubborn heart which called for Spike, reminding her with torturing clearness of his infantile smile, of his smiling blue eyes, of the warmth he could put at will into his coaxing voice. But even in her torment she did not reconsider her decision to put him out of her life. She had loved Spike with all the fresh young ardor which was hers, had looked upon him as some radiant image of perfection, while Spike had never loved her, had merely condescended to her as some new jewel to wear in his young male egotism, despising her yellow blood even as he condescended. All of this she felt vaguely, lacking words for expression.

"I'm through with Spike," she told the amiably interested O'Flaherty wanly at breakfast next morning.

Observing the reddened eyes and swollen face opposite, Mr. O'Flaherty was moved to offer shrewd advice.

"Yuh begun fer yerself, Rosie," he reasoned judicially. "I wouldn't a-pushed yuh into the wrong road meself 'cause it ain't me way. An' anyhow, I knew yuh'd hit it soon enough. But now yuh started, yuh'll be keepin' on. Nacher-

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ally. Folks won't let yuh do diff'runt down here, yuh bein' mixed blood an' all——" He held up an expostulating hand. "Don't be flarin' up like that. I ain't tryin' tuh insult yuh. I'm fond o' yuh an' I'm handin' yuh straight goods. It's the truth. The best yuh can get outa life is either some fat ole yella Chink or someone fer awhile like McGovern. Straight goods, Rosie, an' yuh might as well face it . . ." he paused, studying her white face compassionately. "An' here's another little tip: The world's mostly made of people wot give and people wot get. And mostly women are the ones wot give. But you, now, Rosie, if yuh gotta be a giver, make the other side pay."

"I see . . ." said China Rose sullenly, quivering lip held firm beneath her white teeth. And she did see.

Later on she astounded Mr. O'Flaherty by a terse announcement of her forthcoming marriage to one Tsing Chung, newly come from far-off Melbourne to visit his prosperous brother in Pell Street.

"He's a Chink, but he wants tuh marry me," she explained briefly. "An' if a fat ole yella Chink or wot I've had's all I'm goin' ta get outa life, I've a mind ta try the Chink. He'll take me away from here an'—an' mebbe I'll



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getta new deal out there." She did not say it, but her frantic desire to get away was at least partly due to the occasional sight of Spike McGovern.

"Mebbe yuh will," agreed Mr. O'Flaherty with unexpected sentiment. "I'm hopin' so, Rosie. It ain't no easy road, the one yuh been goin'. An' it don' lead nowhere where the scenery's pretty in the end!"

He gave her his blessing, a set of red fox furs, and a bottle of gin for wedding presents. The wedding itself was a large affair involving most of Chinatown, with a feast at Ling Foo's Suey Palace to wind up with, where Mr. O'Flaherty himself became gloriously drunk.

Tsing Chung, the elderly rotund bridegroom, was more than content with his bride. From the first moment she had dawned on his enraptured eyes her exotic beauty had delighted his senses, blinding him to the remonstrances of his Pell Street brother.

"Indeed is she beautiful," pointed out the staid brother. "But better beside a hearth is a heart of virtue than a beautiful face."

"Her beauty is like to that of a golden-haired goddess of seventy times seven sins!" proclaimed the infatuated Tsing Chung poetically. Then, more practically, "I am not young, my

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brother, yet possibly will I obtain from the strength and beauty of this golden-haired goddess the son of my desire."

"When does a brain fevered with love listen to words of wisdom?" sighed the brother acquiescently.

"What beside the prattle of men children at an old man's knee is the trifling matter of chastity?" demanded Tsing Chung in return.

He said as much to China Rose when she made frank allusion to her past.

"I ain't been no shut-in doll, Ching-a-Ling," she said to him over a table in the rear of Mr. O'Flaherty's poolroom, blue eyes slightly weary. "Not knowin' anythin' about life 'ceptin' wot I heard. Not me! But I done as well's I could, me bein' wot I am. An' as well as folks would let me."

"Indeed so," agreed Tsing Chung, freely admiring her square shoulders and delicate waist. Undoubtedly the man child of such a woman would be strong and splendid. "So that you keep your sins henceforth to the bosom of your family, what is past is dead and shall not be revived."

"An'," said China Rose defiantly. "See that foot——" she thrust out a pretty foot significantly. "It ain't never been bound an' it

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ain't never goin' ta be. It's been free to walk where it wanted, an' it's goin' ta keep on thata ways." A pause. "I'm white an' I'm free—see?"

"You are white and you are free," agreed Tsing Chung cordially. And love barred any hint of mockery from his slanting eyes.

He kept his promise, Tsing Chung the tailor. In Melbourne China Rose was as free as in her native Pell Street, scandalizing the staid Chinese by skimming the streets at all hours in reckless pursuit of amusement, chaffing the sailors from various boats, giving them as good as they sent in her ready slang.

"Truly this wife you have brought from a far-off land makes of her name a wall for all men to throw mud against!" said Sun Yat the Soothsayer maliciously to Tsing Chung in The Gathering Place of the Most High, where he had gone to spend a peaceful hour with his kind, listening to bits of current gossip and quieting his nerves with opalescent poppy smoke.

"If an eagle be caged, will it not droop and die?" queried Tsing Chung placidly, inhaling deeply. "And does not my golden-haired wife come from a land claiming the eagle as an emblem of the freedom of its people?"

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"Much harm will come of it," muttered Sun Yat, unconvinced.

But Tsing Chung only smiled. He was happy, remonstrance and criticism alike glancing from his armor of happiness harmlessly. China Rose had brought to his declining years a warm breeze of happiness, with her free ways and her banishing of dullness indulging his own long stifled sense of romance. Out of sheer gratitude he defied Chinese convention for her sake even as China Rose defied dullness.

After the coming of the sturdy, blue-eyed, yellow-skinned son, named Dennis in honor of Mr. O'Flaherty, his gentleness and kindness redoubled. China Rose had given to him a brief season of youth in which to banish the heaviness of his increasing years, and now the joy of joys, a son to worship at his grave, a new link in the family chain.

Rocking the baby in his strong arms, he would listen placidly to China Rose's sharp complaints against life in Melbourne as opposed to the brightness of Pell Street.

"Gawd!" China Rose would weep. "I'm that dull I can't stand it." After which she would burst into a storm of shrill invective which broke harmlessly upon Tsing Chung's unchanging gentleness.

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But in the end she would be remorseful. "Yuh oughta take a cane tuh me, Ole Socks," she would apologize pathetically. "Honest, I dunno wot makes such a lil' beast outa me. Seems like sumpin's drivin' me all the time an' I gotta act up. Ye're good tuh me, but I'm just rotten, that's all."

And Tsing Chung, listening, his son held close in his protecting grasp, would reason shrewdly that it was the yellow and white races warring incessantly in her veins.

"I got one of them devil things yuh talk about ridin' me," Rose would finish dejectedly, intense blue eyes wistful and appealing.

Involuntarily Tsing Chung would shudder. In company with his kind he nursed a whole-some awe of devils.

Then from America came the son of the Pell Street brother, returning the visit of his uncle as courtesy required.

Tsing Chung made him welcome, doubly so in that the Harvard education and tailored clothes of his nephew lent added face to himself among his associates in The Gathering Place of the Most High. But it must be admitted that Tsing Fong was not popular.

"He seems—ah, your honorable nephew—to

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lack the courtesy and respect for age in which a son of China is reared," protested Nat Hong Ku the merchant, after listening interminably to a glib exposition of the superiority of American methods over those of any other nation.

"His eyes," said Sun Yat the Soothsayer meditatively, "are set together like those of a fox. Truly will he bear watching lest thy most precious jewel be stolen."

A hush fell upon the gathering, a hush before which Tsing Chung gathered his belongings and betook himself away, considerably troubled in his kindly heart.

And that, it seemed to him, was the beginning of the great unhappiness which came to torment him, driving out the old peace and content so that even the beloved little Dennis was nothing more than a dead weight in his anxious father's arms.

They were so suited to each other, the sleek Tsing Fong and China Rose. Even their early associations had been much the same. The same school, the same sights, the same childish games . . . Perhaps, in those days of her association with Spike McGovern, China Rose would have scorned the sleek yellow Tsing Fong of Pell Street. But now, in her loneliness and dullness, she made him eagerly welcome, listen-

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ing hour after hour as he poured into her attentive ears tales of the old familiar streets. And, watching her rapt face and seeing the shimmer of white shoulders through flimsy silk, the too close together eyes of Tsing Fong from Pell Street would narrow thoughtfully.

Tsing Fong lingered on and China Rose became radiant. No more did the front room, with its expensive lacquered furniture and gorgeous rugs, its blooming lilies and gay strips of satin, embroidered in sayings of the ancient philosopher before Confucius, echo with her weeping complaints against the dullness of life. It echoed, instead, to the music of her gay, caressing laugh. Yet, strangely enough, depression had settled heavily upon Tsing Chung. After awhile, quite a long while, he recognized the meaning of the grayness which had closed in upon him: it was jealousy.

Then it was that the criticism of the staid Chinese of Melbourne began to penetrate to his heart, no longer guarded with the armor of happiness, together with wisps of suspicion floating back from his knowledge of the sordid youth of China Rose.

Yet even after he knew beyond doubt that her heart was entwined around this sleek-haired intruder with his Harvard accent and glib sure-

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ness of self, Tsing Chung defended China Rose stoutly in his thoughts.

"They are both young," he reasoned sadly, knowing how utterly his associates condemned his weakness, "and I understand. I myself am—ah, regrettably no longer young. And love is a madness which leaps in the night, claiming its prey. Presently will this intruder return home and things become as before. And when all is said, has not the China Rose brought into my life all the warmth of her own beauty and youth?"

With this he steeled himself against the silence which fell immediately he entered the room where the two sat together; against the joyous laugh which floated down to him where he sat cross-legged on his table at work; against the torment inflicted by China Rose when every word she uttered shaped itself around Tsing Fong from Pell Street.

"He's class!" she would say jubilantly to Tsing Chung. "An' smart as a steel trap. An' those swell clothes he wears . . . an' the way he talks!"

And Tsing Chung would agree with gentle irony, praying daily to the bronze tablet which represented his ancestors for relief from the infliction of his nephew's presence.



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"Old stuff!" sniffed Tsing Fong one day, regarding the bronze tablet contemptuously.

"New ways for youth, age does not change, preferring to cling to customs tried and true," defended Tsing Chung tolerantly.

"If yuh'd come outa that habit of livin' 'way back a thousand years, yuh'd find this a pretty good lil' ole world, Ole Socks," rallied China Rose good-naturedly.

"Honor, respect for age, courage to do right . . . all these are old things," rejoined Tsing Chung. "Yet are they not what all men live by?"

Involuntarily China Rose shrank back with dropped eyes, even the suave Tsing Fong losing a hint of his accustomed poise.

"He's such a nut!" exclaimed China Rose hastily. "All these years a-savin' an' scrimpin' tuh go back tuh China. How's he know he'll like it when he gets there?"

"China . . ." began Tsing Chung. And stopped. How make clear to young China the reverence and adoration in his heart for China with her broad rivers and temples?

In the silence which followed, Tsing Fong narrowed his eyes in calculation. How much money had his uncle collected in the years of saving and scrimping? This emotional inter-

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lude with China Rose might be made profitable if there were money enough . . .

Standing there, regarding the blonde beauty of China Rose, it occurred to him that he could sell that beauty in China for a round sum when he wished to be rid of her. Perhaps, thought Tsing Fong to himself, he and China Rose would take that trip to China in place of the foolish old man. Tunelessly he began to whistle, an American habit detested by the quiet-loving Tsing Chung.

"I ain't goin' ta do it!" refused China Rose hotly a few days later. "He's a good ole sport, Ching-a-Ling is. All his life he's been wantin' tuh go back tuh China, an' I ain't goin' ta knife him in the back. Gawd—ain't it enough tuh steal his wife 'thout takin' his money too?"

"But, O Beloved of My Heart," soothed Tsing Fong softly, "I am not wealthy and without money to go far from the vengeance of Tsing Chung we will be killed." A pause. "Would you have me go without you?" he added craftily.

Before the brooding eyes of China Rose flashed a picture of the dullness of the days before the coming of Tsing Fong from Pell Street, together with an acute realization of her need

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of a younger companionship than that of Tsing Chung. "Not that!" she sighed unhappily.

Seeing her indecision, Tsing Fong renewed his pleading. "This grubbing Tsing Chung will have other years in which to get money, My Plumblossom—years in which we shall be together.

"Together . . ." breathed China Rose in ecstasy, eyes in rapt adoration upon the slender Tsing Fong. "Yuh love me, Honey-Lamb?"

"More than the rivers love the great sea which draws them to its breast," lied Tsing Fong. "More than the nightingale loves the song of the male at mating time."

"Once . . ." said China Rose with bitter memory, "I said as how I'd never trust a man again. But it's a thing a woman never learns: Not tuh trust a man wot says he loves her!"

So, on an afternoon not long afterward, Tsing Chung climbed the steps from his day's toil to find afternoon sunshine gilding the lilies in the square pots on the windowsill and the infant Dennis crying lustily into emptiness.

Lifting him in his ponderous arms, Tsing Chung spoke to the indignant child. "We are two men in a household where there is no

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woman," he said gravely. And then: "Where no woman will ever be," he amended.

When Dennis, fed to repletion, fell asleep, Tsing Chung inspected his rooms. In one lay his cash box—empty. In another he picked up a crumpled announcement of a steamer sailing for China from the littered floor. In yet another he found the ancestral tablet splintered by a contemptuous heel.

"This must be avenged," said Tsing Chung aloud heavily. "Insult may perhaps be offered to the living and remain unavenged. But never among our race is insult to the dead left unpunished."

Later, sitting forlornly by the window with the blooming lilies, looking out to where moonlight cast a veil of enchantment over the clutter of the dingy street, he thought sadly of China Rose, without rancor, without resentment, only with sorrow.

"Always in this world must some be born butterflies forever trying to fly in the sun of happiness; and some be born tortoises plodding through the sands of reality; and some be born thieving foxes," he said gently. "Yet will a butterfly be a butterfly. And always must a butterfly yearn for happiness."

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With the youthful Dennis Tsing Chung began shortly thereafter a journey which ranged from Soochow with its canals to Peking of the high walls, from Canton with its fragrant camphor-wood coffin shops to Hong Kong, where eastern seas bubble up hot to the touch of a flaming sun. Patiently he made inquiry regarding a golden-haired woman with slanting eyes, knowing these peculiarities would be marked and remembered by the inquisitive Chinese.

And in Shanghai, many months later, when he had almost given up hope, he located China Rose.

"The woman is ill and evil days have come upon her," said his informant, beady eyes bright with curiosity. "But she lives near the waterfront in the house of an old woman."

"The wings of the butterfly are broken," said Tsing Chung to himself, after the man, his curiosity unsatisfied, had gone.

He found China Rose huddled on the floor in a heap of rags, her face flushed with fever, golden hair untidy, blue eyes wide and bright.

"It's Ching-a-Ling!" she said without fear, recognizing him with a crazy laugh.

Then, plucking restlessly at her ragged dress, "I'm glad yuh come, Ole Socks. I done yuh dirt, an' I'd like a chanst tuh say 'I'm

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sorry' before they ring the bells on me."

Tsing Chung approached, his heart wrung with pity at the sight of her miserable condition. And of a sudden her mouth twisted.

"That Tsing Fong . . ." she gasped agonizingly. "He weren't no good. Sold me out tuh a bloomin' tea house—made a tea house doll outa me wot's always been free!"

"There, Little Butterfly," soothed Tsing Chung gently, gazing at her drooped mouth and tormented face. "I know."

"But I got away . . ." she rushed on triumphantly. "Sumpin . . . sumpin I want tuh tell yuh, Ching-a-Ling!" she added incoherently. And lapsed into unintelligible delirium.

Why Tsing Chung, with every intention of making China Rose expiate her sin, should carefully nurse her back first to something like health is a twist of Oriental reasoning incomprehensible to Occidental mind.

Nothing could have been kinder or more gentle than the skill with which he nursed her, lifting her in great kind arms to rest her weariness, purchasing for her the comfort of an American brass bed with white sheets.

"I don't see why yuh do it," pondered China Rose one day, comfortable against her fresh linens and soft pillows.

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A faint pink had come back to her hollow cheeks, her eyes had something of the old sparkle, the golden hair had been carefully arranged by Tsing Chung. "Good ole Ole Socks!" she finished feebly.

A pain of reminiscence, dagger sharp, thrust deep into Tsing Chung's soft heart.

"Now that you are better, we will talk," he said, settling himself beside her on the floor.

"Dennis?" inquired China Rose in a whisper. "Where's *he*?"

"With an honorable kinsman," informed Tsing Chung.

"I s'pose I ain't fit tuh see him?" longingly.

"You are not fit," agreed Tsing Chung.

"I'm sorry now fer wot I did," said China Rose. "But it's too late now—it always is too late when yuh are sorry."

A long silence. Then, looking at the face with its slanting blue eyes and golden hair he had so loved, Tsing Chung spoke sorrowfully. "The wrong you have done me could be forgiven, but a stain rests upon the name of my honorable ancestors. There is but one way——"

A smile of faint amusement touched the pale lips of China Rose. "Still livin' a thousand years back, Ching-a-Ling?" she murmured. "Well, I'm Chink enough tuh know wot yer

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mean, Ole Socks. An' if my dyin's goin' ta give yuh any real satisfaction, I reckon I don't mind. Mebbe in that next world they don't draw the color line so almighty close!" In her words throbbed the old, old hurt of the night she had broken with Spike McGovern.

Shakily Tsing Chung prepared a drink of rice wine in a goblet of beaten silver centuries old, dropping into its depths a pill of uncooked opium, after which he handed it to China Rose with hands which trembled visibly.

"Gotta have a lil' more nerve tuh get away with this sorta thing, Ole Socks," chided China Rose affectionately, with a wisp of her old reckless laugh as the wine slopped over onto her thin hands. Then, looking down into the goblet: "Ain't it like life, Ching-a-Ling?" she sighed. "Pretty on top an' bitter underneath?"

Unhesitatingly she drained the goblet, handing it back into his trembling hands with a smile. "There, Ole Socks, goin' ta fergive Rosie fer bein' a bad girl? I been punished. That Tsing Fong—he wuz a bad lot. It wuz him busted yer tablet. I tole him tuh let it alone, but he wuz that mean!"

Drowsily she let her head slip back against the pillows.



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"Not so bad, Ole Socks, this dyin' business. Mebbe I shoulda tried it sooner an' saved a lotta trouble for everybody!"

And then, looking down at the elfin wistfulness of her sleepy face, a cry of irrepressible regret surged up from the very bottom of Tsing Chung's heart. "If only you could have appeased the wrath of my ancestors!" he stammered. "If you had but punished this wicked Tsing Fong I could have forgiven you!"

China Rose smiled the elfish smile with which a child betrays knowledge of some secret prank. "Then the joke's on you, Ole Socks," she murmured sleepily. "It's wot I wanted tuh tell yuh before: That Tsing Fong . . . I got him. Slid a knife right in between his rotten ribs. So I guess . . . the joke's on you, Ole Socks!"

And, looking downward at her face, like that of a naughty sleeping child, realizing that for him all the light and beauty and joy in life had vanished forever, Tsing Chung, shrunken and old, acknowledged she was right.

**“THE GOLD LACQUERED  
BOX”**





**T**HEY were twins, the brothers Sing, born to the childless wife of a jeweler in the Forbidden City at the season of the Chinese New Year, when giant firecrackers of rejoicing were bursting into crimson fragments and street stalls were piled high with silver strips of sugared cocoanut and candied citrous fruit.

Upon the unrestrained joy of the jeweler and his wife, however, the priest who came to shave the infants at the feast of the shaving of the head laid a chastening admonition:

"Such great good fortune will undoubtedly attract the attention of evil spirits," he announced gravely to the jeweler and his doll-like wife in her gay brocade coat and trousers.

Thoughtfully he studied the two gold-colored infants in their jackets of red, their trousers of blue, and their shoes of purple. "One of these infants will be inhabited by an evil spirit escaped from hell, casting evil influence upon all he beholds," he finished solemnly.

"But which?" breathed the frightened parents.

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"Now that . . ." hesitated the priest calmly, ". . . is something even my great wisdom cannot determine."

Uneasily the jadeworker and his wife regarded the two gold-colored infants, as alike as two peas, while their guests prepared hastily to depart.

Then the wife of the jadeworker, summoning the guile of a mother, regained confidence. "The father of my sons is a man of power," she asserted. "Moreover does he possess a gold lacquered box containing a porcelain fish. Long years have the family of Sing held this porcelain fish in the gold box. And in all these years good spirits have guarded the family from evil."

"A most potent charm," agreed the priest dubiously.

"*And,*" continued the jadeworker's wife, her courage increasing, "to my sons as milk names will I give the names of girls, fooling the evil spirits into believing they are of no consequence. Moreover . . . will I pierce the right ear of each and insert rings, causing even the jealous gods to believe they are girls, and therefore not desire them!"

"A wise precaution!" assured the priest admiringly.

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The twins thrived, but in later years their marvelous resemblance diminished, minute physical differences distinguishing each from the other: Sing Lu was taller, thinner; Sing Foo shorter, sturdier. Other less apparent differences, striking deeper, also served to separate them into individuality.

From Sing Foo, the younger by a matter of minutes, the dogs of the street fled in a shrieking crescendo of horror when he appeared on his sturdy little yellow legs, his hair gathered into a topknot above his gleaming eyes. Children playing peaceably scattered as leaves before a wind at his warlike approach.

From the gentle hands of Sing Lu, the elder, even the goldfish and turtles of the temple pools fed fearlessly, all manner of living things divining in him a friendly sympathy.

As they reached manhood the differences in the two widened into a breach, cleaving them in twain. Sing Lu leaned to the life of a student, finding pleasure in the beautiful words of Li Po and Po Chui-i, poets of the Chinese golden age, in the sayings of the gentle Gautama Buddha, and in drawing melody from bamboo flute or san sheu. For Sing Foo, the younger, only the vices of his country held attraction: the hot sting of Chinese rice whiskey flavored

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with powdered ginger, the drugged lethargy of poppy fumes, the swift thrill of gambling tables edged with crowding, intent yellow faces.

"Truly," said the jewworker to his elder son, "are you the light of my days while your brother is the thorn in my flesh!"

"He is young, O Respected Father," would defend Sing Lu gently. "Perhaps in later years he will achieve wisdom and we can form of him a man of standing."

Dejectedly the jewworker would shrug eloquent shoulders. "Can rotten wood be carved?" he would demand. "And does wisdom come where the room for it is not swept and garnished and made ready? Ahi . . . the priest spoke truly at the shaving feast: Your body is the dwelling place of good spirits, and that of your brother of a spirit from hell!"

Owing, according to the jewworker's bitter insistence, to the evil influence of his younger son, his business dwindled and fell away.

A day came when the father, summoning his two sons into his presence, laid upon them his commands:

"The business which is mine no longer provides rice for four mouths," he informed them. "Wherefore it is advisable your daily rice be

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earned elsewhere. Leng Hi, now returned from a far-off land, has told me tales of the wealth a prudent man may garner there. To each of you, therefore, will I give four pieces of gold and a sharp knife of bright steel. And to Sing Lu, who is the elder and my beloved son, will I give the gold lacquered box with the porcelain fish—this that your fortunes may prosper. And of your good fortune a share is to be returned to me, your father, according to the duty of a good son.”

“It shall be done,” agreed Sing Lu, receiving into his hands reverently the gold box.

“For the gold-lacquered box and the porcelain fish I will give to you my four pieces of gold!” offered Sing Foo greedily.

“I am the elder, to me belongs the box,” refused Sing Lu.

Fires of hate kindled in the smooth yellow face of Sing Foo, and the father, watching, sighed sorrowfully.

“Always upon what his evil eyes behold falls the influence of evil!” he complained.

Wherefore, after the departure of the two, he took pains to cleanse his home of the presence of evil spirits by an exploding of some two dozen packs of firecrackers and an offering of paper money at the temple.



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In Melbourne, in The Street of a Thousand Delights, Sing Lu labored faithfully, hoarding his four pieces of gold and guarding the gold-lacquered box, while Sing Foo squandered his gold in the establishment of Wong Ting Fu, with its ebony bunks and tasseled pipes and in that house behind the balconies of which gleamed pearl-white faces.

To the remonstrating Sing Lu he made sneering reply: "Life is short, O Respected Elder Brother, and the blood of youth runs hotly but once. Who can tell of the next life—or the last? To me there is no yesterday, since that is past; nor any to-morrow, since that may never come; there is only to-day."

"Never will you repay the four pieces of gold to our father with such talk!" protested Sing Lu.

"But you, O Hard-Working One, will repay it four times four," retorted Sing Foo impudently. "For have you not the porcelain fish to assure your fortune? Give to me the porcelain fish and I will work!"

"Not so!" refused Sing Lu. "Who knows but you would exchange it for poppy smoke?"

From the lowliness of pushing a barrow with its freight of wilted vegetables, Sing Lu rose in due time to the dignity of a tiny shop, bringing

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with him from his barrow days but one thing of value: his friendship with Gwenny, daughter of an English adventurer drifting in from the bush to die.

They met first on a day when Sing Lu, leaving his barrow in the sun while he delivered vegetables to a thrifty housewife, was moved by sudden shouts into returning hastily to salvage his wares from a band of marauding boys. And then, trying with both hands to protect his stock and likewise his shins from sly kicks and scrapes, he became aware of an avenging whirlwind in the shape of a striking, kicking girl of fourteen in a torn dress.

Presently they stood alone, the tall Chinaman, his dignity unruffled, and the flushed, panting Gwenny, one sleeve torn away from a milk-white shoulder, her ruddy hair streaming down to either side of her pink and white face, one lip slightly cut and a thin trickle of blood oozing down.

"It weren't fair!" exclaimed Gwenny passionately to Sing Lu. "So many o' them an' you just one! And yer didn't do nothin' ter them."

And, looking down at Gwenny with her passionate resentment of injustice, admiration stirred and woke in Sing Lu. "You might have

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been hurt," he said in the careful English he had cultivated. "Why should you risk so much for a yellow man?"

"It weren't fair!" repeated Gwenny hotly. "Yer hadn't done nothin'!"

Gravely Sing Lu selected a banana from his cart. "Will you take it?"

"Won't I just!" Ravenously she fell upon it, extending something in the way of apology for her rapacity. "Sometimes we eats in our family, an' sometimes we don't," she explained with dry humor. "An' just now we don't! The guv'nor—he don't care much, he's a drinker, an' men wot drinks don't eat overmuch. But me now—I got an appetite."

"Every day," promised Sing Lu, "will I bring to you a gift of food."

"Ye're all right, Chinky!" cried Gwenny joyously. "I'll *be* here."

During the years Sing Lu patiently pushed his barrow, he liked to feel, watching the steady growth of the girl, that he had helped minister to that growth. And since, in every being possessed of the creative impulse, exists in exact proportion a need of creation demanding outlet, as the months slipped by Gwenny became in no small measure the creation of the lonely Sing

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Lu, her plastic soul taking on his own love of beauty, something of his gentleness, his worshiping admiration of purity, honor, and fair play. Not even Sing Lu, thrilling with the pride of achievement as Gwenny expanded into beauty both spiritual and physical, realized how much of his own soul had gone into her development.

"Two things worth while there are in this wicked world . . ." Sing Lu would say in his gentle sing-song voice to the raptly listening Gwenny "... beauty and love!" One kind hand would stroke Gwenny's untidy curls. "Yet beauty—even such as yours, Little Flowering Tree—must be unspotted with evil to bloom into perfection. For always evil destroys the thing it has marked as surely as locusts destroy a harvest."

"Ye're a rum one!" Gwenny would retort, his words finding an echo in her own breast. "But somehow I likes ter listen ter yer, Sing."

Only once did Sing Lu see the father, a bloated, shifty-eyed, untidy man in no wise resembling Gwenny with her bright fearlessness.

"He says as how he's me dad," confided Gwenny, trudging alongside of Sing Lu to the amusement of beholders. "But I'm takin' his

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words with a pinch o' salt. I don't somehow feel we're related. An' I'd not be feelin' that way if he was."

But Sing Lu, remembering the perpetual enmity between himself and Sing Foo, his twin, was not so sure.

"There is, sometimes, Little Plumblossom," he explained softly, "a kinship between strangers, between even people of a different race. And then, sometimes between those of the same blood a distance which cannot be traversed."

A pause while Gwenny dug for the meaning of his words. "It's true!" she agreed excitedly. "There's you an' me ter prove it, Chinky. I'm happy when I'm with you, Sing, even if ye're yellow an' all. But when I'm with him——" she shivered distastefully. "I wants ter get away. I feels just like a rat caught in a bloomin' cage turnin' round an' round . . ."

"He is—ah—unkind to you?" inquired Sing Lu gently.

For answer Gwenny turned up her ragged sleeve, exposing a circle of violet fingerprints against the milky whiteness of her slender arm.

"He pinches, tryin' ter make me holler. An' he hates it because I won't!" she explained succinctly. "He used ter beat me—pokers, sticks,

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anything he could grab. But now——” she threw back her head, squaring her shoulders proudly. “He’s afraid, wot with his goin’ downhill so fast, he ain’t strong enough. He just comes sneakin’ up back o’ me an’ pinches, sudden-like . . .” Flame showed in her superb tawny eyes.

Sing Lu said nothing, but with the queer intuition existing between them, she divined his sympathy.

“Never mind,” consoled Gwenny. “He won’t last long now. An’ it ain’t so bad any more. Up in the bush where we didn’t see any one often, it was fair bad . . .” she gave a shrug of repulsion. “But now he don’t darst touch me often.” A pause. “One thing, though, it’s put me off men forever, knowin’ wot a beast he is. There ain’t goin’ ter be no man in my life—not after *him!*”

“There is love . . .” objected Sing Lu quietly.

“*Love!*” Gwenny gave a scoffing laugh. “S’pose my mother thought as how she loved *him*—else why would she be wantin’ ter be with him? An’ look wot she got outer it: kicks an’ curses an’ blows an’ hard work every day o’ her life. That’s wot love means fer a woman!”

“Yet for you there will some day be love,”

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persisted Sing Lu, looking down at Gwenny with her strong shoulders and white arms, her length of limb and her firm young breast. "For every one, perhaps not, but for you . . . yes!"

"I hates men—all exceptin' you," insisted Gwenny doggedly.

"Yet there will be one you will not hate," said Sing Lu with something of sadness. "See, Little Wild Bird, it is the nature of a tree to bud, of a flower to bloom, and of a woman to love . . . for that is life."

"Ain't yer a queer one!" exclaimed Gwenny derisively. "Yer talk like a bloomin' book. Wot does yer know about love yerself, Sing?"

For just a second a smile, half bitter, half sweet, twisted the thin lips of Sing Lu as to him came brief remembrance of a haunting face showing from a sedan chair decked in Imperial yellow, then further remembrance of a high wall scaled by agile limbs and of the flushed face and trembling hands of a princess of the blood imperial. But since, after all, the son of a jadeworker has nothing in common with a wearer of imperial yellow save perhaps the sudden flowering of mutual passion, the memory of golden moments spent together, and the

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sharing of the pain of parting, Sing Lu put remembrance definitely away from him.

"One man learns by lack, another by possession, yet in every heart is a knowledge of love," he returned evasively.

"Ye're a queer one!" speculated Gwenny. "But I likes yer anyhow, Sing."

The liking continued. When Sing Lu abandoned his barrow and started up his tiny shop, Gwenny would descend upon him at all hours.

"How's business, Sing?" she would inquire gayly. And then, hungrily: "Wot yer got fer me to-day, Ole Yeller Sweetness?"

"Sweets from far-off countries." Sing Lu would smile, holding out some trifle, his heart beating in tune to the music of the voice which had come to mean so much to him.

And Gwenny, utterly disregarding the slinking Sing Foo, would perch on the side of a barrel, entering into gay, rallying conversation with Sing Lu, shrugging aside the sly glances of Sing Foo fastened upon her slim white throat and the brightness of her hair.

"I can't stand that there brother o' yours, Sing," she complained frankly. "He fair makes me shiver like I'd touched a toad or



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some'thin'! Queer, ain't it, me thinkin' so much o' you, an' him bein' yer brother!"

"Perhaps not entirely queer!" retorted Sing Lu thoughtfully.

"Keep your evil eyes away from this flower I have tended so carefully," he commanded sternly of Sing Foo when they were alone. "Else will I turn you into the street to beg for your daily rice."

Sullenly Sing Foo obeyed, but in his evil fancy the image of Gwenny persisted, not to be banished by Sing Lu's threat.

And then, with Gwenny growing into increased beauty and his little business prospering mightily, came for Sing Lu the beginning of evil days, bringing a dimness to his narrow almond-shaped eyes and peopling his world with ever darkening gray shadows.

With his keen Mongolian brain Sing Lu, struggling with the gray shadows, realized fully what this would mean to him. Soon—very soon—the rapidly prospering business would slip through his fumbling fingers into the greedy grasp of Sing Foo. That was inescapable. For the strong were the good things of the world intended; for the weak only the drippings from the full pot of the mighty. Presently for him would be only a grudging corner

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in his own shop, the charity of a casually thrown word, for his active brain the golden beads of thought he had garnered in his years of study, for his darkened eyes only the pictures remaining of that colorful life in the Forbidden City.

Day after day he strove to fix pictures upon his mind with every detail of glowing color: The great gate to the Forbidden City itself; the garden of the Imperial palace; a patch of clear turquoise blue sky among a rift of mounting clouds; a painted houseboat floating down a river at peachblossom time; the slim sickle of a moon shining through papery leaves of bamboo . . . jealously Sing Lu caught at every fragment of beauty which had made itself felt in his life. This much he would have—no more.

"Two things there are in life which are worth while . . ." he repeated again and again as the dragging days went by and Sing Foo's sharp eyes penetrated his effort to disguise his failing sight ". . . beauty and love." A pause. "The one I shall keep . . . but the other——" he sighed, turning the key to remembrance upon his past. "Of what use is love to a blind man?" he finished philosophically.

Gweny's distress when she learned of his misfortune was pitiful.

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"It ain't fair!" she insisted, in the very words of their first encounter. "What'd yer ever do ter have this come upon yer? If it'd been that there Sing Foo now, it'd be different—but *you*! What'd yer ever do, Ole Yeller Sweetness?"

"Eyes which cannot see outwardly, see inwardly, O Tender Little Heart," consoled Sing Lu. "Many things are clear to me which were not clear before. Always for everything taken away is something given in return."

"Ye're a rum one!" cried Gwenny in a voice choked with tears. "But I'll be standin' by yer, Sing. An' if that ugly Sing Foo gets too much fer yer, I'll take yer in. Now that the guv'nor's gone—Gawd rest him—there ain't no one but just me."

"O Tender Little Heart!" said Sing Lu again, and in his own voice was a surging of emotion.

"Ain't I wot yer made me?" demanded Gwenny unsteadily. "Look——" she directed his straining eyes to a passing figure with run-down heels and draggled plumes. "Exceptin' fer *you*, there goes *me*! Where was I ter learn all wot yer taught me about bein' decent an' all? Yer kept me from starvin' an' worse many a time, Sing."

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"Your eyes," returned Sing Lu gently, "were upon the gutter which is filled with filth, and I have lifted them to the sky, which is filled with beauty." A pause. "According to the Lord Buddha, it is the duty of each soul to assist in the growth of another," he finished.

Accurately he had forecast his future. With his growing blindness Sing Foo gathered the business into his own avaricious hands, nor did Sing Lu outwardly resent it. The strong progressed, the weak endured, according to their capacity, he told his sore heart. It was life, therefore it must be just.

Days followed in which Sing Lu, solitary and apart, except for the kindness of Gwenny, strove for a philosophy to blunt the edge of his loneliness.

"There is no Sing Foo; there is no blindness; there is only my individual self with its memories. All else is nothing; only what is past is real," he would murmur again and again to himself.

In the Gathering Place of the Most High, where he went occasionally, drawing deep into his lungs acrid smoke provided by the generosity of the worthy Nat Hong Ku, his blindness was a subject for jest and reproach, for the Chinese are notoriously lacking in sympathy.

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"Of what use is the lotus pipe to a blind man?" would jeer fat Ah Ling, the importer.

"Not so, O Pudding on Legs," would retort Sing Lu. "The lotus pipe sets free the eyes of my spirit, and I see . . ."

He was fairly launched into a marvelous tale, speaking rapidly in a high sing-song voice, setting forth a colorful romance of the vanished land, making clear a picture to dull brains.

"You are a poet!" would extol Nat Hong Ku admiringly.

"I am but a paper tiger, a man without eyes, a lion without teeth," Sing Lu would demur placidly.

And, hearing, jealousy would seethe in the narrow soul of Sing Foo, his twin.

"One thing has this paper tiger which I still covet!" he would murmur to himself, thinking of the gold-lacquered box. Then, his thoughts going to the pink and white and gold beauty of Gwenny: "And perhaps another!" he would finish, a smile of malice uncovering his yellow teeth. "Yet to the patient are all things possible!"

Wherefore to Sing Lu he said bluntly: "Since light has been denied your eyes the daily rice you consume is wasted. If you want something sharp, here is a knife; if you want some-

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thing soft, then here is a rope, new and strong. And when you are most satisfactorily dead, then will I send you back to our father in a coffin ornamented with crimson dragons, to be buried by him in a pleasant place most agreeable to your spirit."

"You are, O Younger Brother, in all things to your interest most considerate," refused Sing Lu with gentle irony.

His very gentleness inflamed Sing Foo to further malicious speech.

"These many times have you rebuked me for my conduct, O Respected Elder Brother," he continued, grinning with rage. "Quoting to me from the weak sayings of Gautama Buddha, and warning me of great misfortune to come of my wicked ways. Yet to me has come prosperity, which is the seal of a successful life, and to you, believer in gentleness, in truth, and in mercy, has the great misfortune come!"

"The power of the Lord Buddha is great," disputed Sing Lu, lifting his sightless eyes upward. "In his own time, in his own way, he will speak forth."

And something in his air of quiet certainty checked the speech on Sing Foo's evil lips.

Gradually the obsession of Sing Foo for the  
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gold-lacquered box and Gwenny's young sweetness deepened into an intensity haunting his dreams, and into the murky depths of his eyes, watching the thin sleeves clinging to Gwenny's lovely arms and shoulders, came a dancing flame.

"You plitty gurl!" he cooed once ingratiatingly in the pidgin English he affected, when she stopped in, demanding Sing Lu, only to find him out on one of his aimless excursions.

"Velly plitty gurl! Plitty gurl like you glet plitty, plitty things . . ." he continued, expressionless eyes tracing the curve of white throat to where it was enveloped in concealing cloth.

"Swell chance!" retorted Gwenny indifferently. "An' I'm perticklar where I get pretty things from—see?"

Sing Foo ventured the familiarity of a puffy yellow hand laid upon Gwenny's round white arm. "You velly plitty gurl," he persisted in his soft guttural voice, unwinking eyes upon her flushed face.

"Cut it!" ordered Gwenny belligerently. "An' wot's more, yer can cut out the sticky looks yer keeps givin' me. I ain't got no use fer them."

"You mally with me?" suggested Sing Foo surprisingly.

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*"Me marry with you?"* Gwenny threw back her head, exposing the soft white of her throat, laughing so that the scarlet roof of her mouth and sound white teeth gleamed at the watching Sing Foo. *"Me take up with a fat, ole yeller Chink? Ye're crazy, Sing Foo, clean crazy!"*

With a final shrug of contempt, she switched away in her superb young strength, stopping in the doorway for a last shot at Sing Foo. *"Blamed if I c'n swallow as ye're really a brother o' Sing Lu!"* she called back angrily. *"Yer great, fat, lazy, cheatin' Chink!"*

*"To-day you laugh, Little White Moth!"* snarled Sing Foo behind her in Chinese, spitting his words through clenched yellow teeth. *"And yet—who knows? Perhaps some day the Little White Moth will flutter too near a flame and to Sing Foo will be given a chance to laugh. And on that day Sing Foo will laugh long and loudly. But you, O Little White Moth, on that day you will not laugh!"*

And then for Sing Lu came that hour which comes to spiritual and actual fathers alike, in which the forming of new ties overshadows the old completely.

As he had prophesied, Gwenny fell in love.

*"Yer said it yerself, Sing,"* she acknowledged



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humbly, sitting down beside him, bright head resting on his thin knee. "It's the way o' life fer trees ter bud; fer flowers ter bloom; an' fer a woman ter love! Yer said it all."

Stoically Sing Lu smoothed her bright curls. "Yes?"

And Gwenny told her story—told it with the humility of one passing through a totally new and upsetting experience.

"I didn't think as how I'd ever be carin' about a man—me knowin' wot it means fer a woman," she said tearfully. "But when it comes, it comes. There was I, walkin' down the water road, an', comin' from the other way, this sailor chap. An' he stops short when he comes alongside o' me, an' I stopped with my silly heart feelin' like a lot o' little birds had sorter burst inter song. An' fer a time we stood an' looked, each at the other, an' I didn't know him an' he didn't know me, an' yet, somehow, it was as if we'd known each other always, an' been waitin' fer just this thing ter happen. An' he speaks up an' says ter me, bold-like an' still not impudent: 'I'll be walkin' along o' you, Sweetness!'

"An' I looks up inter his eyes an' wot I saw there I don't know, but in that minute I wants ter walk along o' him worse than I ever wanted

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anythin' before. So I gives a silly, happy-like laugh, an' we walks off together with the sky bluer an' the grass greener, an' the sun brighter than ever before. An' that was the beginnin' o' it . . ."

"That . . ." agreed Sing Lu absently ". . . is the beginning of love, Little Flower. Between man and woman in the first meeting exists either indifference or that attraction which is the beginning of love." There was in his tone something of the mellowness of an ancient temple bell overlaid with the bronzed patina of ages, subtly blended with the poignant ache of relinquishment. "And now you will no longer need Sing Lu," he finished dully.

Always he had known that some day he would be superseded in Gwenny's heart, yet knowledge that the time had come was hard to bear. He had so little in that world of shadows which surrounded him. If perhaps he had made use of his influence with her, had traded upon her gratitude . . . Abruptly he checked the thought. What had a yellow man to do with this child of the sun?

"Need yer?" repeated the puzzled Gwenny. "But o' course I'll be needin' yer just the same, Sing. Wotever made yer think I wouldn't?"

Sing Lu smiled wisely. "From now on the

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pleasure of guiding your footsteps will belong to this man of your heart," he said, hating himself for the stab of jealousy which shot through him.

"But there's room in plenty in my heart for both o' yer!" protested Gwenny in hurt surprise.

After she had gone, for just one moment of weakness Sing Lu dropped his face into his thin yellow hands. "It is hard!" he said aloud.

From the rear of the store the spying Sing Foo jeered at him. "Only to a man of strength is given his desire, O My Brother!"

"Be silent!" commanded Sing Lu. "It is not given to you to understand, O Son of Evil, that love to which only the pure in heart can attain."

And when, some few days later, Gwenny fluttered into the store all aglow with happiness, he had his jealousy well under control.

"See!" she said breathlessly to Sing Lu. "Feel my ring, Sing Lu? I'm married; married by a rector in a frock an' all. *He* wanted it that way . . ." A pause, her fingers twisting in mute agony of separation. "An' now he's gone away; his ship sailed ter-day. O' course he'll be comin' back, Sing, but I can't believe as how it'll ever be just the same again.

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Nothing like that *could* last, 'cause if it did, this'd be heaven, not earth. No . . . he'll be comin' back an' maybe a time'll come when it'll be fer us just as it is fer all the others—the quarrelin' an' the ugliness. But that won't stop me from carin'. I couldn't stop if I wanted to!" Her voice melted into wistfulness. "Four months ter wait afore he comes back, an' four months is a cruel long time, Sing."

"Yes," agreed Sing Lu quietly, sightless eyes turned straight before him. "Four months can be a very long time, Little Flower."

In the months which followed he was the old Sing Lu, kind, thoughtful, filled with gentle sympathy and understanding, listening gravely to the flood of joyous confidence Gwenny poured upon him. Every sentence she began turned in the direction of her man before she had finished it. Endlessly she talked of him, and endlessly Sing Lu listened.

He was on the landing pier with Gwenny, at Gwenny's urgent request, the day the *Mary B* landed four months later.

"I wants you two ter know each other," she explained wistfully. "Bein' as how yer both mean so much ter me."

And Sing Lu, wondering if the charity and

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understanding of the other man would cover the difference in color and caste, had consented.

"I don't see him," complained Gwenny, her soft hair blowing in the breeze, her cheeks pink with excitement. "Seems as how he oughter be at the rail wavin' ter me."

Then, with a swift pang of foreboding, "Maybe something happened!"

"Has not love wings with which to shield the beloved?" comforted Sing.

"Look——" cried Gwenny, unheeding. "They're a-helpin' some one up ter the rail. Why, it's *him!*" She gripped Sing Lu with agonized fingers. "Wotever did they do ter him—he's white as paper, with his eyes sunk 'way back in his head. Here I am, Darlin'"—waving frantically, choking back the sob tightening her throat. "Waitin' fer yer just as I said I'd be. Here I am!" Her voice died away in a whisper of dread. "Sing—he's sick. They're a-helpin' him down the gangplank. He looks—why, he looks like he's a-dyin'!"

With a rush she was gone, and not until hours later did she remember that she had left Sing Lu alone to find his way back through the perpetual darkness surrounding him. Then she hurried to him on penitent feet.

"Sing!" she cried remorsefully, finding him

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sitting patiently behind piles of golden oranges and yellow bananas. "I don't know how I ever left yer exceptin' I was so upset seein' *him* so white an' all . . ."

"Where the heart calls, the feet must respond," agreed Sing Lu. Then: "He is ill?" he inquired with gentle sympathy.

A silence.

Sing Lu repeated his question. "He is ill?"

And then the news came out in a gasping flood of anguish. "He's goin' ter die!" cried Gwenny despairingly. "He's had fever an' his lungs are all wrong." A pause. "I had a doctor, one wot costs a guinea a visit, an' he says as how if I don't get him where it's always warm an' dry he won't pull through—my Dick!" Tears streaked her rounded cheeks, her voice quivered. "Does seem like with so many men in this old world, it needn't a-been him, don't it, Sing?"

"But he has a chance," encouraged Sing Lu.

"Not him!" denied Gwenny. "We've no money an' it takes money fer two people ter go where it's warm an' balmy an' spend a year doin' nothin'."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sing Lu poignantly. One short year before he could have solved Gwenny's problem. But now . . .

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Gweny sensed his worry. "Don't go broodin' over it, Ole Yeller Sweetness," she reassured gallantly. "It fair struck me in a heap, happenin' so sudden-like. But I'll find some way—only it's got ter be some way I can get it in a hurry."

In his own mind Sing Lu was considering the problem. "All I have left is the gold lacquered box," he reflected. "Yet even that, if it would suffice, I would sacrifice."

Rising carefully, he patted Gweny on one square shoulder. "Perhaps to a blind man will be granted the privilege of doing an act of mercy."

"Don't worrit yerself," bade Gweny affectionately.

But she sat on in the little shop pleasantly filled with the fragrance of ripe fruit, and presently Sing Foo came from the rear of the store, sly eyes straying to where Gweny sat deep in thought.

"You like see something plitty?" he called.

"It's *you!*" greeted Gweny without enthusiasm.

"You like see something plitty?" repeated Sing Foo stubbornly.

Indifferently Gweny leaned against the counter. "Wot bloomin' nonsense is it now?"

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Sing Foo held out a circlet of gold gleaming with light.

"*Gold an' diamonds!*" gasped Gwenny in awe, a veritable hunger in her tone. "Where'd yer get it, Sing Foo?"

"You plitty gurl . . ." purred Sing Foo. "You like blacelet?"

He waited, beady eyes upon her face.

"Yer sneakin', yellor devil!" gasped Gwenny. "Yer heard wot I said ter Sing!"

"You plitty gurl . . ." repeated Sing Foo in his slurring accents with a sinister gentleness, turning the bracelet between his fat hands so light shot from it in blue and white sparks.

"It must . . . be worth a heap!" stammered Gwenny longingly.

Tantalizingly Sing Foo turned the bracelet again, and, watching the blaze of gems, to Gwenny came a picture of a white face with sunken cheeks, and the sound of an incessant cough racking a broad chest. *Gold and diamonds!*

"I said as how I'd do anythin' ter save him!" she whispered pitifully to herself in what was almost a prayer. "But *this*—no, my man'd rather die than be saved like this! It'd be *better* fer him ter die than be saved like *this*! I—I couldn't go back an' face him."



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Anger began to beat through her in a still white flame. She turned upon Sing Foo, throwing words at him with the effect of hurling missiles.

"You—yer sneakin', yeller devil! I knows yer game. Allers a-sneakin' around waitin' an' waitin' fer yer chance. An' now yer thinks as how yer got me—only yer ain't. For I'm tellin' yer there's things higher than life itself. Sing Lu, yer own brother, taught me that in the days when I was a hungry little shaver wantin' food worse than I ever thought as how I'd want anythin' again!"

Indifferently Sing Foo turned the bracelet. "To-night I leave the back door to my shop open," he stated calmly. "You want blacelet, you come in back door to-night."

"I ain't a-comin'!" shrieked Gwenny furiously. "I ain't . . . ain't."

Whirling, she disappeared through the door, before her tormented eyes the picture of a blazing circlet of light jostling that pitiful image of smitten strength.

Behind her Sing Foo smiled wickedly. "She will come back," he said with calm certainty. "Yes, undoubtedly she will come back, this little white moth fluttering toward the flame."

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And *then*—"his face set in lines of cruelty. "Then shall this little white moth discover the scorching heat of flame!"

Appreciatively he regarded the bracelet. "Imitation gold glitters bravely," he chuckled. "And sham diamonds blaze brightly. Truly in all things am I, Sing Foo, an excellent man of business!"

A pause while he rubbed his hands in satisfaction. "This undoubtedly is to be for me an auspicious day," he reflected aloud. "And since this day is to see the realization of one of my twin desires, shall I not also realize the other?" Greedily his thoughts fastened upon the image of the gold lacquered box.

"Long have I desired this box of gold until desire runs like a flame in my veins," he muttered. "Shall I longer deny this consuming hunger?"

Whereupon he conferred with Loo Hong, a villainous associate deriving his living from dubious sources.

"Many years have I desired the gold lacquered box containing the guardian of the Sing fortunes," he explained over a tumbler of rice whiskey flavored with ginger. "And long has my brother possessed it. Regrettably he seems

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endowed with everlasting life by possession of the box. Could that life be shortened it would be worth much money to me."

"A worthy thought!" smirked the lean and hungry Loo Hong, "which shall be rewarded by a most unique taking away of this annoying brother—a taking away which shall come as a delightful surprise to your august self." A pause. "Where keeps your worthy brother this box of gold?" inquired Loo Hong softly.

Sing Foo hesitated cannily. "The box of gold with the porcelain fish protects only the fortunes of the Sing family," he remarked warily.

"Indeed so!" agreed Loo Hong, hiding a smile. "To my family the possession of a porcelain fish would be most unfortunate, only creatures of the air possessing friendly influence."

"The box," said Sing Foo, reassured, "is kept in a chest of camphor-wood to which my brother carries the key."

"Keys can be duplicated," assured Loo Hong. "I have in my possession keys of great number, at times most useful to me."

With mutual compliments they separated, Sing Foo returning to his shop.

"On this day," he murmured to himself,

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picking his way carefully over mud puddles and once over the rotting carcase of a long deceased dog, "will I realize my twin desires, possession of the box of gold and of that flower my brother has reared in all sweetness."

Standing without his door, he pondered deeply. "Are the good rewarded with their just deserts?" he questioned contemptuously. "Not so! To my brother has come only poverty, blindness, love denied, and now loss of the gold lacquered box and of life itself! Whereas to me, his unworthy brother, has come possession of riches and will come the gold box and this bud of an alien race. Wherefore are the teachings of the Lord Gautama Buddha, gentle tales suited to children and the weak, and not to a man of strength like myself!"

Snapping his fingers contemptuously, he unlocked the door, spitting at the image of Buddha, installed by Sing Lu on a shelf at the rear of the shop, before he seated himself comfortably with pipe and tiny lamp.

"Ahi!" he purred, twisting an opium needle in the treacly black mass until a tiny bead adhered to its tip, and transferring it to the tiny blue flame. "Flowers will I place in her unbound hair. And jewels around her slim white neck, even upon her soft white toes." Opales-

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cent smoke rolled away from the fizzing bead upon the needle. "Once this little white moth laughed at Sing Foo, yet to-night, in spite of the many gifts I shall heap upon her, the little white moth will not laugh. Yet I, Sing Foo, will laugh until I am drunken with the wine of laughter!"

He was not altogether pleased with the abrupt entrance of Sing Lu.

"State thy business and begone, O Crawling Worm!" he commanded haughtily. "For to-night I myself have business of importance to do with this bud of another race which you have reared into beauty."

"I come upon a matter of business," stated Sing Lu, producing the gold lacquered box from his sleeve. "Yet I warn you, O Creeping Slime, that a tower of evil reared to a certain point topples to a fall. And whoso attempts to destroy what is altogether good is himself destroyed. Moreover . . . where I have obeyed the teachings of the Lord Buddha in all things, permitting you to thrive unmolested in all your wickedness, yet harm so much as one hair of this little daughter of my spirit, and on that day will I, Sing Lu, lift my hand against you in settlement!"

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"Your words are full of power—not so your hands!" sneered Sing Foo. "Wherefore I fear not. State the business which brings you here and begone!"

"For five hundred pounds English will I give to you the box of gold."

Sing Foo blinked in astonishment. "For five hundred pounds you will sell the good fortune of the Sing family?" he inquired ironically.

"Even so," assented Sing Lu.

Sing Foo hesitated thriftily. He had already paid out a sum which would insure him possession of the box and riddance of this hated brother, why squander a further sum?

"I no longer desire the box," he stated complacently, his hands twitching with eagerness to hold it in their grasp.

"Then," said Sing Lu, turning away, "it remains for me to find another purchaser."

"Wait!" commanded Sing Foo hastily, perplexed over this new angle of the problem. Did Sing Lu dispose of the box the sum paid for his taking away would be wasted. Likewise it would be necessary to arrange for the killing of the new possessor of the box, which might be troublesome and expensive and bring

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upon him the vengeance of a rival tong. If he paid the five hundred pounds to Sing Lu soon—very soon—he would regain it.

"I will give you the five hundred pounds," he decided abruptly.

"Counted out in gold," stipulated Sing Lu.

"Even so," agreed Sing Foo wryly. Going to his safe, he produced a clinking sack of gold, counting out the money carefully.

Sing Lu himself counted the gold with slender, sensitive fingers, weighing each coin in his thin palm.

"It is correct," he pronounced at last, producing a square of strong silk and tying it up.

"The box!" cried Sing Foo in a smothered voice. "The gold lacquered box with the porcelain fish!"

Sing Lu passed it over with something of sadness. "It is here."

"Begone!" cried Sing Foo furiously, his greedy hands closing upon their prey. "And be assured that when worms are feasting upon thy hated body I will not even afford the charity of a rented grave!"

The sightless eyes of Sing Lu strained at him from the doorway. "In all things have I obeyed the teachings of the Lord Buddha," he reflected aloud wistfully. "I have not borne

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malice. I have tried to do and think only good things where many times it has been difficult . . ." he sighed. "Yet do I believe that in his own good time the Lord Buddha will speak. For truly if such a plant of wickedness be permitted to flourish, then wherefore is good good and evil evil?"

"Begone!" hissed Sing Foo, livid with rage.

Alone, he raised the box to his cheek, delighting in physical contact with its metallic smoothness, crooning to it as if it were alive.

"Mine . . . mine!" sighed Sing Foo in ecstasy of possession.

Presently, his exultant mood calming, he lowered the box, opening it with eager fingers and thrusting in a greedy hand for the porcelain fish.

And of a sudden that groping hand ceased. A look of horror and surprise crossed his suffused face. A shriek of imprecation burst from his sagging lips as he remembered Loo Hong, his sly inquiry regarding the whereabouts of the gold box, and his promise of a delightful surprise.

"*Fool!*" shrieked Sing Foo in loud Chinese. "*Fool! Blunderer! Goat with the Brain of an Ass!*"

Surprisingly he slithered down to the floor



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and from his very inertness it was evident life had fled.

Then from the half open box lying just beyond one black and swollen hand a sliding, shining something emerged, skimmed the floor in swift flight, and vanished through the unlatched door, seeking vainly a refuge of shrubbery similar to that of its native land . . .



# A PRINCE OF CHINA





**I**N the very beginning the lives of Chang Tung, born to the splendor of a Manchu's palace in the Forbidden City, and of Chin Yuen, growing into beauty and grace in the countryside of Canton, and of the evil Li Chong, spawned on a sampan in the crowded harbor of Shanghai, lay far apart.

Never in those first radiant days could Chang Tung, first-born of a mighty Prince, have foreseen that his glory would vanish, obscured by clouds of disgrace, and that for him the high point of his life would come in Li Chong's Palace of Heavenly Entertainment in far off Melbourne, when his slow descent into degradation would be arrested by the love of a slave girl and he himself thrust upward again into dignity and honor.

Nor could Chin Yuen, the slave girl, have foreseen in the happy days when, from sheer lighthearted gayety, she danced upon a carpet of cherrybloom in the courtyard of her many-eaved home, that the father who had been all kindness and love would change to a wasted

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severity sacrificing his well loved daughter to a further procuring of the opium which deadened him to all ties of honor and affection; or that she would one day dance, less lightheartedly, for the avid-eyed frequenters of that same palace of Li Chong.

Not even Li Chong himself, greasing his body and sticking his queue full of needles to lend a degree of safety to his profession of thief, had any idea that he would one day be rich and powerful by reason of a less venturesome thieving, or that he would hold in his power a prince of the race which scorned him.

Yet these things were to be: In the gambling palace of Li Chong these three lives so widely separated by circumstances of birth were to run briefly parallel, brought together by the working out of destiny, and becoming in the end inextricably snarled, only that of Chang Tung the Manchu emerging clear and free. . . .

Li Chong of Shanghai came, in the beginning, of the lowest strata of society. His mother was a river girl of Shanghai, than which there is no greater depth of degradation. Spawned as casually as one of a litter of pigs in the tiny sampan, reeking with filth, which she plied back

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and forth in the crowded harbor, his arrival presented a problem demanding immediate solution, maternity failing to appeal either to her sentiment or to the economic conditions under which she existed.

Wherefore, as indifferently as if he had really been one of a litter of little pigs, perhaps more so, since pigs have a distinct value, she spurned him forth to shift for himself almost before his eyes were open. Had he been a girl, those carts creaking down the twisted streets of Shanghai before dawn would have added one more to the tiny bodies which were their freight. As it was, his sex secured him a temporary delay. The protesting infant, shrieking lustily against the discomfort of the chill air, was set adrift in a leaky old tub, faring forth into the darkness like some weird ship seeking adventure, bumping against various objects in the cluttered harbor as it went.

Among other things the tub collided with the sampan of a solitary boatman, who threw up his hands in amaze.

"So little and so angry!" he marveled. "Truly the evil spirits will be attracted by the bleating of this young goat. And if I refuse aid, who knows but they will levy toll from me, already most unfortunate!"

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Whereupon he lifted the shrieking child to his arms, with the gratifying result that the crying ceased immediately, the hungry infant nuzzling the hand which held it.

"Ahi! what a greedy one!" shouted the boatman jovially. "Another hungry mouth to feed, eh?"

Prudently he thought of his wife and of the girl child he had disposed of without loss of time in his rage and disappointment at the non-arrival of the long desired son to worship at his grave.

"Where there is food without cost shall the hungry not be fed?" he inquired cannily, regarding the child which had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion. "And, moreover, where the feeding of a useless girl child may be extravagance for a poor man, yet is the rearing of a son entirely a different matter."

To his wife an hour later he remarked briefly:

"The gods which denied me a son have relented. Here then is our son."

"But this little monster has the face of a pig!" protested his wife, shrinking back.

"The little pig is hungry; feed it," commanded the boatman roughly. "And let not

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the mother of a girl child be over ready to find fault with the son the gods have sent."

Reluctantly the woman took the strange child to her breast. "Yet has this child the face of a pig," she insisted rebelliously.

Perhaps to the boatman's wife in that moment was given some prevision of the qualities Li Chong would later develop, for ill did he repay his rescuer, cracking the skull of his foster father in his fourteenth year and escaping with the meager handful of Chinese silver he reaped by that murderous act.

"Shall three mouths be given food where only one need be fed?" he had reasoned callously, reflecting upon the feebleness with which age and poor living had endowed the boatman and his wife. "Not so!"

After devious wanderings and deeds, which, once discovered, would have hung him by the head in a criminal's cage to hang until he was dead, he found his way to a land supervised by the more merciful justice of an alien government. And here, as proprietor of the gambling house, he waxed rich and powerful.

In years gone by Li Chong's Palace of Heavenly Entertainment stood upon that corner of the Chinese quarter of Melbourne where



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lean, black-sateen-smocked workers now thump heavy irons until far into the night.

Gone are the famous underground rooms fitted out in gorgeous furnishings of carved teakwood in red and ebony, the amazingly thick rugs blending faded tones of rare old blue and purple and rose. Gone are Chang Tung the Manchu, who played upon his silver flute, and Chin Yuen with her quaint posturing dances and small wistful face. Even Li Chong himself is gone since that day when, looking up from the abacus on which he was counting with greedy fingers, he saw, looming large above him, the tall presence of Chang Tung the Manchu, and, seeing the implacable purpose in those glittering eyes above him, recognized his doom in the half second before the curved steel of Chang Tung's knife left a fast widening smear of jetting crimson across his lean throat.

To himself in that brief instant Li Chong smiled defiantly. "*Yet* am I the victor, O Heaven-Born!" he gasped triumphantly. "Because always you, O Manchu, will remember—whereas what is death but a forgetting!"

In which he was entirely right. Chang Tung the Manchu did remember. Even after he had gone back to the Forbidden City of his youth

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and become a power in his struggling country, part of him still lived in the gambling-rooms of Li Chong.

Li Chong in his embroidered satin robes; Chin Yuen in her pale blue trousers and jaunty coat, a budding lily against the smooth blackness of her hair; Chin Yuen lying straight and stiff and cold, deaf to his ardor, a smile of resignation upon her flowerlike mouth . . . out of the past came these vivid pictures to torment Chang Tung even in his great ancestral halls. This is the story:

In the days which are gone, Li Chong's Palace of Heavenly Entertainment presented to the casual passerby a deceptive front in the guise of an innocent business in preserved fruits and delicacies, embroidered coats, and carved trifles from China and Japan.

But once evening came and the heavy green shutters were barred and bolted into place, the initiate trod an eager path to the back room and downward underground to where Li Chong himself, arrayed in heavily embroidered satin, greeted his paying guests with the ironic smile of one who earned his living by catering to the vices of his fellowmen.

And, greeting that smiling figure with suave

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courtesy, one and all thrilled to the presence of something subtly menacing, vaguely felt in the person of Li Chong, placating him with fulsome flattery and coarse adulation before hastening to the tables where games of Fan Tan, Chai Mui, and Po Tsze were in progress under the charge of an expressionless Chinese.

Fortunes were lost—seldom won—over the tables of Li Chong. At least a half dozen men have been beggared of honor, even life itself, over those smooth tables. But always, in spite of the tragedies great and small which follow the hazard of chance, the tables were fringed with crowding, intent yellow faces, for the typical Chinese is an inveterate gambler.

Late one night, turning away from the tables, Chang Tung, born to the splendor of a Manchu's castle in the far-off land, the story of his fall from glory presenting an Odyssey only second to that familiar to literature, drew nonchalantly from his sleeve a silver flute.

For the gravely listening Chinese he played first a song soft and silken as the texture of lotus buds in first bloom, changing to harsh and strident measure lifted from the battle chant of the hill warriors of China.

When he had finished, he looked at Li Chong. "My wealth has vanished," he explained.

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"Each night will I play to your guests . . . for a consideration."

And Li Chong, his lip quirking with contempt as his eyes passed over the shabby figure confronting him, sunken to the last depths of poverty, yet betraying in coppery skin and high-bridged nose the irrefutable fact of Manchu birth, smiled insolently.

"For your playing will I give to you each night the equivalent of two dollars Mex," he agreed softly, reckoning in the coinage which is the trading exchange in Shanghai, his native city. "Surely, to me who was born a coolie, it is worth that to have a Manchu as my servant."

In which he was quite correct. For always, in spite of his seeming greatness, knowledge of ignoble birth throbbed just below the surface of his urbanity, flooding his secret soul with bitterness.

Then, on another evening when the liquid notes from the silver flute of Chang Tung mounted high in the smoke-filled room, one Tai Cheung turned sullenly to Li Chong.

"All that I possess has gone to swell your wealth, O Great One," he announced, "save only one thing . . ."

"And that?" smiled Li Chong affably.

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"A pearl of beauty which I have brought from Canton for sale to one of sufficient wealth to pay the price."

The oblique eyes of Li Chong narrowed swiftly. "Has any man greater wealth than I?" he inquired insolently. "I, Li Chong, will wager against this unseen pearl of beauty any sum you name."

"Two thousand pounds English!" cried Tai Cheung greedily.

"Indeed!" assented Li Chong. For just a second one of the lids veiling his slanting eyes trembled into an imperceptible wink toward the Chinese presiding at the table.

Shortly afterward Tai Cheung turned away, furious with disappointment.

"You are—ah—satisfied?" purred Li Chong.

"Entirely so," acquiesced Tai Cheung, murder in his heart.

"Then produce this pearl of beauty," demanded Li Chong.

And when, some few minutes later, Tai Cheung returned, leading the veiled figure of a young Chinese girl, drawing away the veil with reluctant hand, an exclamation of gratified surprise burst from Li Chong.

"Ah!" said Li Chong, drawing a great breath.

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Color flushed the young face, accustomed only to the eyes of father and brother. Timidly the wide-apart eyes sought the floor, as she shrank from the crowding, eager men.

"Can you dance?" inquired Li Chong after a second's thought.

"I can dance, O Great One." He barely heard the timid answer.

"Play!" commanded Li Chong insolently of the Manchu.

And Chang Tung, lifting his silver flute obediently, felt in his heart the first stirrings of pity as the trembling girl began a quaint posturing, using a fan now as a sword, now as an instrument of coquetry.

"Each night," announced Li Chong importantly, "will Chang Tung the Manchu and Chin Yuen, the Bud of Beauty, entertain my guests."

From under the heavy eyelashes of the shrinking girl, remembering other dances in golden sunlight upon a carpet of cherrybloom, tears ran down over her small, wistful face.

And, seeing, Chang Tung of a sudden brought from his flute the high, shrill melody with which the hill warriors hurl anathema against their enemies.

In the days which followed they were two

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very miserable young people, Chin Yuen nightly displaying her fresh young beauty in the posturing dances performed for the delectation of the frequenters of Li Chong's Palace of Heavenly Entertainment, and Chang Tung, fallen from the glory of his high estate to the disgrace of accompanying those same dances with the charmed music extracted by his supple yellow fingers from his silver flute.

Nightly Chin Yuen sobbed in the shelter of the friendly darkness in an anguish of longing for the broad breast of her mother and all the dear familiar things which had gone to make up the home of her childhood: the flowering plum tree in the courtyard; her brothers in their gay jackets; the very tip-tilted eaves of that home itself . . .

Nightly Chang Tung, remembering the life to which he had been born, writhed beneath the acid contempt of his fellowmen, scorning to give outward sign of the shafts which pierced his sensitive pride.

And nightly Li Chong rubbed his hands with satisfaction at the beauty of Chin Yuen and the talent of Chang Tung, his mean soul rejoicing in this highly gratifying humbling of the mighty.

"And you say your highly respected father

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was a Mandarin clad in silken breeches of state?" he would inquire of the sullen Chang Tung.

"A cousin of the Yellow Emperor!" would correct Chang Tung furiously.

"And now you work for me, born of a river girl of Shanghai!" would marvel Li Chong maliciously. "Truly the ways of the gods are wonderful to behold."

A silence.

"Yet you are grateful for the crumbs which fall from my table of plenty, are you not, Dragon Brood?" would inquire Li Chong softly in his flat nasal tone. "For truly gratitude is a most admirable emotion." Beneath the softness of his voice was a perceptible threat.

"I am grateful!" would acknowledge Chang Tung, hating himself for the weakness which overlooked insult.

"Yet you remember, perhaps, other days?" persisted his tormentor.

"I remember other days," would admit Chang Tung, hot color flaming in his coppery skin.

"Days in which, at the court of the Yellow Emperor, you strutted peacockwise, sensing, perhaps, from behind latticed walls, the admir-



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ing glances of young buds of beauty?" insisted Li Chong one night, winking at his hearers.

"Perhaps."

A shout of mirth went up from the company as they eyed his rags and unkempt appearance.

"Is he not sweet scented and a lover for any maid?" demanded Sun Yat the Soothsayer, smacking his lips with appreciation of his own jest.

Li Chong smiled cruelly. "Then since this is so," he suggested, "let us put it to a test, O Pekinese." A pause, for the effect of heightening suspense for his eagerly listening audience. Then he continued smoothly: "I am wearied of Chin Yuen with her tears and lamentations. Win her heart and she is yours, together with one hundred pounds English—enough to take you back to the Forbidden City."

"And if I fail?" inquired Chang Tung, plucking at the silver strings of a guitar. "What then, River-Spawned?"

"Then shall you work for me five years without return," decided Li Chong greedily.

"Truly a most liberal proposal!" extolled Sun Yat suavely.

Abruptly Chang Tung twanged the strings of his instrument, considering the proposition.

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To refuse meant disavowal of his own words and a further losing of face before these low-born merchants. To win . . . involuntarily his thoughts went to the pearl-white face of Chin Yuen.

"What of the little Autumn Breeze if I refuse?" he inquired slowly.

Li Chong shrugged. "Perhaps I will sell her to Yoh Kee, who has offered a most gratifying price."

In silence Chang Tung considered, visioning the tender, unhappy youth of Chin Yuen in the establishment of Yoh Kee, from which, not infrequently, under cover of nightfall, other even younger girls had been carried forth, their eyes closed in the sleep which comes of a pill of uncooked opium.

"I accept your terms, O Turtle from Shanghai!" he agreed quietly. "But for a fitting in the sun of courtship butterfly raiment must be provided. A nightingale in the plumage of a crow will not be distinguished by its beauty."

"It shall be so," agreed Li Chong unwillingly, after due reflection.

Sun Yat the Soothsayer considered the slim length of Chang Tung appraisingly.

"In brighter plumage this strutting peacock may succeed," he informed Li Chong dubiously.

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Li Chong smiled vaingloriously. "Shall a full-fledged owl of wisdom be trapped by a fledgling of sprouting wings?" he demanded. "When did the wisdom of Li Chong ever propound a riddle without knowledge of the answer?"

"I will play for you," announced Chang Tung, lifting his flute to his lips. He played a song of old China, silken sweet and crystal clear, full of the beauty of plum trees blossom laden and of moon magic. Then, his audience wrapt in the dreams his music had awakened, abruptly he changed to the familiar song of the hill warriors, loud, crashing, and full of subtle insolent challenge.

Across the gulf of listening faces the eyes of Li Chong and Chang Tung met and held . . .

Later, hearing the familiar sound of low sobbing, Li Chong stopped in the doorway of Chin Yuen.

"You are sad, Little Bud of Beauty," he said mockingly. "But here is news to dry thy tears which drip as unceasingly as spring rain. A lover is to pay court at your shrine, sweet scented, garbed royally, and of glorious ancestry . . ." he paused, studying the flushed, tremulous face of Chin Yuen. "All the pleasures of courtship which the foreign devils enjoy

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shall be yours," he continued suavely. "The verses, the gifts, the songs, the gentle words, *yet*——" he paused, and the very gentleness of his tone struck terror to her heart. "Guard well your heart, Little Bud, for should you yield to the persuasions of this golden-voiced pleader, on that day will I prepare for you the round ball of sleep which is the wage of the faithless in heart!"

Shivering, Chin Yuen lay in the darkness after he had gone, wide-eyed and flushed of face, considering this new cruelty devised by Li Chong.

Thereafter followed the enactment of a comedy which tickled the ribs of all the Chinese populace of Melbourne: the spectacle of a high-born Manchu diligently wooing a slave girl, at the bidding of an erstwhile coolie from Shanghai.

"How goes thy wooing, O Hired Lover?" would gurgle Sun Yat the Soothsayer maliciously, meeting Chang Tung in the narrow, congested limits of the street known among the Chinese as The Street of a Thousand Delights.

"Does not a snail creep slowly where an eagle flies swiftly, O Interested One?" would retort

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Chang Tung politely. "Yet does each reach with equal surety his destination."

Tucking a sly tongue in a discreet cheek, Sun Yat passed on, chuckling with mirth.

"Truly this bit of scum born a Manchu talks with a brave tongue!" he confided to Li Chong, whom he met a few steps farther on.

Li Chong, decorously arrayed in the rich black satin he affected, smiled contemptuously. "A crow shrieks as loudly as an eagle," he observed complacently. "*Yet* is a crow always a crow."

"You are forgetting that Chang Tung the Manchu was born an eagle," reminded Sun Yat.

Li Chong shrugged. "An eagle consorting with crows takes on the qualities of a crow," he announced decisively. "Though Chang Tung were a thousand times born a Manchu, I, Li Chong, born of a river girl of Shanghai, hold him in the hollow of my hand. See——" he aimed a kick at a dog, unwisely curious, hovering at his heels. "Chang Tung is like to this dog, broken in spirit."

He aimed a second kick. With surprising suddenness canine teeth met swiftly in the immaculate silk clothing his ankle.

"Ahi, Wicked One!" shrieked Li Chong in wrath and pain.

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"You erred, Most Honorable Li Chong, in not recognizing that the dog, while travel-stained and weary, was born of a good breed," pointed out Sun Yat.

And then it was that, influenced by his pain, Li Chong betrayed the reason of his secret certainty of Chang Tung's ultimate failure.

"The Dragon Brood will fail," he asserted. "Is not my wisdom greater than the cunning of his race? Chin Yuen, who weeps forever in the silence of the night, knows that on the day she yields to the honeyed words of the Manchu she passes into the sleep of unending dreams."

"But . . ." puzzled Sun Yat, not comprehending. "Has not your word been passed?"

"Said I *how* I would turn Chin Yuen over to him?" inquired Li Chong keenly. He shrugged. "And will Chin Yuen, knowing that to do so means unending sleep for herself, yield to Chang Tung? Not so! Yet will they love each other, these two, and loving, will suffer. And seeing their suffering, the soul of Li Chong will rejoice in this exquisite revenge over a haughty Manchu."

"Ahi!" chuckled Sun Yat in sympathy. "A most delicate sport, truly, and devised by a keen brain." A pause. "Yet upon their love

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of each other depends the success of the jest," he pointed out.

"How many moons since a woman has looked with kind eyes upon Chang Tung, sunken into the gutter from which my mercy has lifted him?" argued Li Chong triumphantly. "And the Autumn Breeze which sheds its sweetness beneath my roof is lonely. Moreover, are they both young, and young hearts reach out, each to the other. The heart of Chin Yuen will respond to the silver voice of Chang Tung the Manchu. And Chang Tung, loving this little Mourning Dove, will urge the more persuasively a suit to which she dare not yield. Thus I, Li Chong, will afford a most amusing spectacle to my friends and also win for myself five years' unpaid service, which is a bargain worthy of my wisdom."

"Truly are you most wise," admired Sun Yat. "And not from my tongue shall leak any information to spoil the sport you have devised."

Songs of splendid deeds Chang Tung lavished upon Chin Yuen in the intervals they were together. Gifts provided by the crafty Li Chong he gave to her: Bags of melon seed, boxes of candied citrous fruits, perfumes from the far

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East, and flowers for the blackness of her hair.

Indifferently Chin Yuen received them all. Except for a growing tenderness in her eyes he apparently made no headway, and in the quiet hours of the night her grief still pursued its course like some mighty river unhindered by the flimsy barriers of man.

"Why do you weep?" inquired Chang Tung softly one night, when they stood together, after a just finished dance, and their audience had gone back to the gaming tables.

Chin Yuen lifted great unhappy eyes wet with tears.

"I weep for all I have known and loved," she told him wistfully. "For my home, the happiness of waking in a knowledge of security, and for—my mother."

"You loved your mother?" persisted Chang Tung gently.

A silence. He saw the strained intensity with which her fingers clasped. And of a sudden her smooth, shining head bent low above those straining fingers.

"My mother . . ." sobbed Chin Yuen brokenly. "The life of a Chinese woman is not all happiness, My Lord. We were both women, and therefore were we the closer. Like sisters we were, held in a bond of love of which no man



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can have knowledge, since only those who fear can draw close in mutual need of protection. She was all my world, my mother, and I the very core of her heart." She sighed. "There came then a spirit of evil to live in my father, changing him from kindness and love so that he became cruel and unkind to us. All that we had went little by little to supply him with the poppy smoke he craved . . ."

The sobbing deepened, Chang Tung making a movement of sympathy.

"My father—though he bought her for a bag of gold—loved my mother," said Chin Yuen pitifully. "On feast days he would give her rich gifts: a pot of lilies, armlets of jade perhaps . . . Yet one day he sent her to the temple gardens with my brothers. And when she had gone he sold me to the men from the city. And I went away, always looking backward, my eyes aching to see that face which had been my world . . ."

A pause.

"And then?" inquired Chang Tung gently.

"She came, running, beating her breast with her fists, calling to me——" Again the low, muffled sobbing.

"Poor Little Butterfly!" said Chang Tung

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tenderly. "Listen and I will play a song to heal thy bruised heart."

He played, and from those crystal-clear strains came the elements of a picture: A Chinese courtyard thick with cherry blossoms, the sound of a gentle voice singing, herself a tiny child essaying the first steps of a simple dance . . .

"Ahi!" sobbed Chin Yuen despairingly. "Your music is an ache which reaches my tormented soul."

"In your heart is a great emptiness," counseled Chang Tung, "and a need of love. Fill, then, this emptiness with another image of love."

Then, looking down closely into her wide, dark eyes, he sensed an unutterable reproach which laid upon him a sense of guilt and shame.

"I would not harm you . . ." he stammered suddenly.

"Yet, without knowledge, may one wreak disaster," returned Chin Yuen very gently.

Days followed in which Chang Tung, diligently urging his suit upon Chin Yuen, with all Melbourne Chinatown watching and chuckling, its tongue slyly tucked in cheek, became aware

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of an added feeling of doubt and mistrust which sought to express itself in words.

"We are two outcasts far from all we have known and held dear," he said to Chin Yuen on another night when they stood unobserved in a corner of the great room, Chin Yuen drooping beneath her utter weariness. "And because of that my heart goes out to you like a bird returning to its nest. Yet in that heart which flutters out to yours is only tenderness, gentleness, and a wish to protect. Say only that you love me, Little Spent Bird, and I will take you far away from the cruelty of Li Chong."

"He does not know . . ." thought Chin Yuen unhappily, remembering Li Chong and his threat.

"In our country I was once a Prince," persisted Chang Tung gently. "Did I return there I could perhaps—who knows!—regain my rightful place."

"How should I dare lift my eyes to your greatness, O Manchu Born?" said Chin Yuen almost inaudibly. "I am but a slave girl of Li Chong."

"What matters it if we love?" challenged Chang Tung.

"You do not belong here, O Great One,"

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urged Chin Yuen in confusion. "Return to thy high estate."

Chang Tung shook his head, smiling. And then, touching his coat significantly, "Even my clothes were purchased by Li Chong because of a certain bargain between us," he explained. "Shall a Manchu break his pledged word and become a thief as well?"

Later, sitting at her window in the moonlight, looking out to where the squalor and filth of the street below was redeemed somewhat from absolute ugliness by the kindly veil of moon rays, Chin Yuen thought of her talk with Chang Tung, her heart summoning his image in all the clearness of his young earnestness.

"He will not break his word to the despised Li Chong, this Manchu," she reflected. "Nor will it be permitted me to return to China with him as he desires . . ." involuntarily she remembered the tenderness in his voice and his promise of protection. "I wish . . ." said Chin Yuen wistfully, looking out into the night filled with stars ". . . that I might go back to China with Chang Tung, who is a Prince!"

For a long time she stared out into the darkness, visioning happily that splendid life in the Forbidden City with Chang Tung. "I—I could love him, this Chang Tung," she sighed at last.

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"Yet if I love him, then must I die. And if I deny my love, then will Chang Tung, with all his pride of a Prince, be humiliated in the eyes of these low-born ones . . . wherefore he will flee far from this place of evil, returning undoubtedly to the place which is his, and wiping out the memory of the stain upon his pride with great deeds . . . which is as it should be"—she paused, overcome with sudden bitterness—"for who am I that I should hold back Chang Tung, a Prince of China?" she finished.

Thereafter, with something of the desperation of a small frightened furry creature in a trap, Chin Yuen fought against her growing loneliness and the tenderness for Chang Tung, which threatened the wisdom of her decision.

And when, on a day Li Chong was absent and they were alone, overcome by yearning she kissed the thin curving lips of Chang Tung, she fell on her knees, weeping prayers to the gentle Buddha and his rival Confucius alike in the terror of her frightened youth. Nor could Chang Tung comfort her.

"Who am I that I should dare lift my eyes to your greatness?" wept Chin Yuen. "For you, O Great One, are a Prince of China, while I am but a dancing girl."

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"You are the rose which blooms in my garden of happiness," said Chang Tung softly. "The ray of light pointing the way out of darkness!" Raising her from the floor he held her trembling weight against his breast. "Let me tell this tailless horse you love me," he urged, offering to the absent Li Chong the most deadly of insults.

Chin Yuen moaned with terror. "No, My Lord," she implored, catching him frantically with both fluttering hands. "This thing which has come to us, this flower of our despair—it is so sweet. Let us hold it close in secret before revealing it to the evil Li Chong."

"How can I deny you?" sighed Chang Tung. "Yet are we not free!"

"No woman is ever free," coaxed Chin Yuen. "For just a little while, Lord of my Heart?"

Then, at his nod of consent, she spoke resolutely of his radiant future, painting it for him in glowing colors until the long dead fire of ambition flamed to new life in Chang Tung.

"You will go back, My Lord, to the greatness which will be yours?"

"I will go back!" vowed Chang Tung. "And you, O Pearl of Beauty, will be at my side."

And Chin Yuen, seeing the time when she would dance without even the slender comfort

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of Chang Tung's silver flute, passed a trembling hand across betraying lips. "I!" she let her dark head droop against him. "But assuredly I will be there."

Then, eagerly, "Without my urging you would not have gone back, is it not so, Heaven-Born?"

Chang Tung shook his head doubtfully. "I had sunk so far," he murmured. "But for you, O Flower of Great Sweetness, no height is too steep, no road too rough to travel."

Into the small wistful face of Chin Yuen came a radiance of content. "Even to the smallest may be given greatness of accomplishment," she sighed happily into his ear. "And is it not woman's glory to work through the strength of man rather than with her own weakness?"

Catching the fragrance of peach blossom which drifted to him from the smoothly coiled hair, a tenderness rose up into Chang Tung's throat, choking him into silence. Silently he put out one long slender hand, curving his fingers around the dimpled wrist hidden in her wide sleeve. Chin Yuen looked up at him, in her eyes a rapture of adoration.

"Softly . . . softly, O One Who Holds My Heart in His Hand!" she murmured, hearing the approach of footsteps. "Else Li Chong,

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that despised one, will guess our secret."

"Sharper than the thrust of a dagger . . ." thought Chin Yuen to herself as Li Chong came in, "will be the pain of denying him I love—long distant be that day!"

But in spite of all precautions and the deceptive appearance of indifference the lovers strove to display, a time came at last when Li Chong flung patience to the winds, wearying of his own sport.

"Must this farce, which has dragged beyond even the limits of a Chinese play, endure until eternity closes down like a lid upon all creation?" he demanded impatiently one evening, when his crowded rooms seemed to afford sufficient audience for the finish of his carefully staged comedy.

A hiss of excitement followed. The elbowing, jostling Chinese turned eagerly from the tables to crowd around the unhappy Chin Yuen and the imperturbable Chang Tung.

"Come," said Li Chong roughly to the trembling Chin Yuen. "Tell this boasting Pekinese that he is less to you than the dust which stirs beneath thy footsteps in the dance."

A pause. Chin Yuen looked toward Chang Tung, unwilling to puncture his proud belief in



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her love with a few brief words. In the eyes she lifted to Li Chong was a piteous appeal to be spared from this.

Savagely Li Chong gripped her frail shoulder with one malicious hand, provoked to rage by her continued silence.

"Has the *kia li* stolen thy worthless tongue?" he questioned sharply. "Or must the chastening bamboo caress thy feet to find the lost voice? Speak and tell this Pekinese he is less than nothing, merely a speck floating in the sun of thy happiness. Then, in payment of his boasting, shall this Heaven-born One slave five years for me, Li Chong the Coolie, as was agreed—a five years which most truly shall seem five times five!"

Then at last, hearing his flat nasal tone apportioning to Chang Tung five years of misery, Chin Yuen understood what her denial of love would mean in reality for Chang Tung. Five years the slave of Li Chong even as she herself . . . five years of cruelty and longing for death which would irretrievably break his spirit and forever rob him of his chance of becoming great.

"No—not that!" whispered Chin Yuen to herself in horror. "Not for him, My Prince. I

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am a woman and women are strong to endure. But *he*—he is a Prince of China!”

Oblivious of the staring, curious eyes upon her, she thought her way carefully through the maze of uncertainty and terror engulfing her. And then, surprisingly, the terror left her. “He is a Prince of China and I am but a dancing girl,” thought Chin Yuen proudly. “Yet to him can I give the gift of gifts—his freedom!”

“You err, O Great One!” she said steadily to Li Chong, finding her voice at last—a pitifully husky voice, which, for all that, was strangely clear and quiet, ringing to the farthest outskirts of the avidly listening crowd. “For truly in my ears the voice of the Manchu is like sunshine upon flowers drenched with spring rain. And is my heart a brimming cup filled to overflowing with his image.”

Li Chong gasped audibly. The veins in his neck swelled to alarming size. His voice deserted him entirely. His hands twitched with eagerness to rend Chin Yuen limb from limb. For an interminable minute they stood facing each other silently, Li Chong, Chin Yuen, pathetically white, and Chang Tung the Manchu.

Then Wong Ting Fu, himself a Manchu born,

## THE STREET OF A

now proprietor of a seven-bunk opium layout, voiced the sentiment of the listeners.

"The Manchu wins," he proclaimed exultantly. "By your own terms, worthy Li Chong, the girl and a hundred pounds English are his. We are witness!"

Li Chong swallowed with difficulty. "To-morrow will I fulfill the terms of my bargain," he agreed suavely, terrible eyes upon Chin Yuen. "One hundred pounds English—and the girl Chin Yuen—to-morrow."

Chin Yuen shivered slightly, half closing her eyes. And, looking upon her fairness, her forlorn youth, and her unhappy wistfulness, Sun Yat the Soothsayer spoke uncomfortably below his breath. "Truly it is a pity!" he muttered. And, not wishing to be troubled longer with a sight his knowledge of Li Chong rendered sad, he made his way out.

In obedience to a signal from Li Chong, Chin Yuen also moved to leave the room, pressing close to Chang Tung on her way, her wide eyes, seemingly filled with golden lights, adoringly upon his.

"Soon will you forget the misery which has been yours in this place," reassured Chang Tung tenderly. "Until to-morrow, Beloved Little Flower."

## THOUSAND DELIGHTS

"Until to-morrow!" sighed Chin Yuen. Then, lingeringly, "You will go back, My Lord?"

"I will go back," promised Chang Tung.

Lifting his silver flute as she passed on, he played a melody which laid upon his audience a spell of beauty, holding them quiet where they stood, a melody wistful and sweet, with a note or two of the exultation of triumphant hearts in it.

"It is a Wedding Song," he said when he had finished.

Looking toward the doorway through which Chin Yuen in her blue satin trousers had vanished, his thoughts pleasantly busy with the small pill of uncooked opium he would shortly prepare, Li Chong voiced his congratulations to Chang Tung the Manchu.

"Until to-morrow . . ." he said mockingly, and turned away to hide the evil smile upon his thick lips.

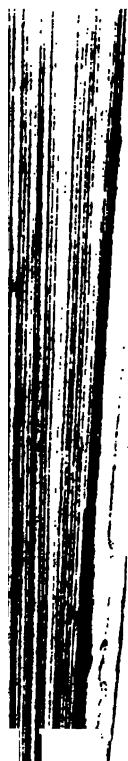


















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